



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

Fall in the garden!

With cooler temperatures and a hint of rain, there's lots to do in the garden right now!

From the Davis Enterprise, October 27 2023

Vegetables

There's still plenty you can plant in your vegetable garden.

- Kale and collards, sprouting broccoli and asparbroc, and broccoli raab.
- There are some faster-developing forms of broccoli and cauliflower that can still be planted.
- Stir-fry vegetables such as pak choi, cutting celery, and snow peas.
- Snap peas and shelling peas can be planted now.
- Leafy greens such as lettuce, radicchio, arugula, mustard greens, spinach, and Swiss chard.
- Hurry, but you can still plant seeds of radishes, carrots, and beets.
- Don't forget onions are planted in early November!

Time to plant cover crops and grass seed.

These are plants that we grow from seed to out-compete weeds, provide organic matter, and add nitrogen to the soil.

Fava beans are fastest and easiest, but clover and field peas are also popular. A traditional combination includes oats mixed with Magnus field peas, a combination which yields a dense cover that crowds out all competing weeds, provides great habitat for birds and beneficial insects, and breaks down quickly into compost after mowing in spring.

It's also a great time to reseed your lawn.

Some favorite flowers for the season

In our last column we mentioned snapdragons, and pansies and violas, for fall and winter flowers. There's plenty more for winter color!

Other annual flowers we can plant right now include calendulas, sweet alyssum, dianthus, sweet peas.

Cyclamen are grown from bulbs and sold in bloom now. They will continue to flower through winter and early spring. The plants go dormant in summer and people often pull them at that point, but the bulbs regrow in fall and last for years if you keep them in the shade and reduce watering during summer. The new mini cyclamens have proven especially long-lived.

Gazanias are perennials that bloom all winter and spring with daisies that are bright yellow, orange, red, and bicolor. Easy to grow in full sun.

It's bulb time!

We plant flower bulbs from October through January for bloom in spring. Hold off on planting tulips and hyacinths until November when the soil has cooled. Now we can plant daffodils and narcissus (including paperwhites), crocus, wood hyacinths and bluebells, anemones, ranunculus, and freesias (both in very short supply this season) and more.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

Many flower bulbs multiply vigorously here, requiring no care after planting and continuing to bloom for years. Some recommended types:

- February Gold is a miniature trumpet daffodil that has increased for decades for me.
- Most other types of narcissus also increase freely, including paperwhites. Note that there are very fragrant paperwhites, which some people find overwhelming, but there are also lightly scented varieties. Paperwhites bloom very early in the season.
- Wood hyacinths and Spanish bluebells are closely related plants that have true blue flowers, are very easy to grow in sun or light shade and increase steadily as the years go by.
- Closely related is *Scilla peruviana* (it's not from Peru, Linnaeus just thought it was), a robust bulb with dark blue flowers in April.
- If you like tulips but don't want to replant each year, consider the "botanical tulips." This is the term used for several smaller-flowered tulips that are less heavily interbred than the traditional types. They have small flowers that are picture-perfect little tulips, on shorter stems. Some such as *Tulipa clusiana* form new bulblets at the ends of their roots, causing them to increase outward to make quite a ground cover.

Shrubs for fall and winter flowers and fragrance.

Sometime in October I get the heady aromas commingling from *Osmanthus fragrans* (sweet olive) and *Cestrum nocturnum* (night blooming jessamine). Each is powerful enough in its own right, with scent that volatilizes and drifts quite a distance from the plant, and both are especially fragrant in the early evening when, presumably, their pollinators are active.

Osmanthus can be planted in fall and is a long-lived upright-growing shrub that has a rather open growth habit. It blends in with other background evergreens and then suddenly surprises you with the burst of tiny pungent flowers in fall and spring. The flowers are sometimes added to tea.

Cestrum is a subtropical shrub, so it is best planted in spring and summer to attain maximum size before winter frosts. Expect some top injury each winter, then just cut it back in spring. Note that *Cestrum* is poisonous.

Southwestern natives

Tolerant of heat and drought as well as intermittent summer rainfall, plants from this region can provide us with lots of late-season blooms that are especially attractive to pollinators and hummingbirds.

Tecoma stans (common names include Esperanza and Yellow bells) is a shrubby plant native from the southwestern US down to Argentina. New hybrids from this southwestern species in the trumpet vine family have become incredibly popular because they are nearly always in bloom, they can be pruned as shrubs, and hummingbirds love the flowers. Look for new orange, red, and pink forms along with the original yellow form. Full sun or light shade.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

Sages from the southwest

Shrubby types or ornamental sages bred from *Salvia greggii*, *S. microphylla*, and other species are often called autumn sage because their heaviest bloom is at this time of year. These are among the favorite flowers of hummingbirds as well as many types of bees.

Mexican sage (*Salvia leucantha*) is just putting on its show of fuzzy purple flowers now and they will continue into early winter.

These ornamental sages are drought tolerant but are also fine with regular summer irrigation, making them adaptable to a wide range of garden uses. These sages are best in full sun.

California natives

California poppy seeds are best sown right before the first fall rainstorm. Poppy seed should not be covered, nor should it be sown where winter weeds will compete with the young seedlings. The seedlings are fragile and transplant poorly. So just buy the seed and wait until the clouds are coming in, and then go out and scatter the seeds onto open ground. Hand-water daily if the rain isn't consistent.

Fall is often touted as an ideal time for planting California native shrubs and perennials. Some bloom at this time of year or provide other garden color.

One great example blooming from late summer through fall is California fuchsia, formerly called *Zauschneria* and now *Epilobium*. There are lots of varieties, mostly electric orange red flowers on plants that range from upright and vigorously spreading to low creeping types.

In any case, give them room. An outstanding guide to the California fuchsias was published in Pacific Horticulture magazine many years ago and is available online:

<https://pacifichorticulture.org/articles/enjoying-zauschnerias/>

Berries of toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) are turning color, usually red but there is a yellow-fruited type called Davis Gold. Toyon is one of our most adaptable native shrubs, capable of attaining great size but amenable to pruning.

Newly planted natives spend fall and winter making root growth, getting them off to a good start for the next growing season. This is a great time to plant coyote bush (*Baccharis*), wild lilac (*Ceanothus*), manzanita (*Arctostaphylos*), Oregon grape, coffeeberry (*Frangula*, formerly *Rhamnus*), wild currants (*Ribes*), and more. Ask about locally adapted cultivars, as many of the popular woody natives are fussy about soil moisture and summer heat.

We get questions... What's that tree that's blooming with the yellow flowers?

Formosan flame tree (*Koelreuteria elegans*) is blooming now.

There are three species of *Koelreuteria* in Davis. Goldenrain tree (*Koelreuteria paniculata*) bloomed in summer, pods have ripened and scattered their seeds, and it reseeds profusely. Not recommended. *K. bipinnata* bloomed next and has pods forming, but they're not very colorful.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California

K. elegans is the latest of the Koelreuterias to bloom locally. The showy pods follow quickly and turn bright pink or red by November. This one barely reseeds, so it is ok to plant locally, but availability is limited.

What do I do about those birds that are eating my seedlings?!!?

Ah, the white-crowned sparrows. Short of lethal measures, which we don't encourage, the best bet is to cover the beds with seedling blankets until the plants are several inches tall.



Miniature cyclamens are long-lasting flowering plants that bloom through the winter and spring. The bulbs go dormant in summer but resprout again in fall.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



Gazanias are flowering perennials from South Africa that are very well adapted to California gardens. New hybrids bloom from fall through spring, often even into the summer. They can tolerate heat and drought.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



February Gold is a dwarf trumpet daffodil that lives up to its name, coming into full bloom in the first week of February. This stand is more than 30 years old, increasing over the years from just a dozen bulbs originally planted.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



Wood hyacinths are easy bulbs that we plant in fall for bloom in spring. They will grow and multiply readily in sun or shade.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



Tecoma stans is a flowering shrub that's native to the American southwest and further south. It's tolerant of heat and drought, blooms readily even when pruned hard, and continues to flower right through the fall here. The original form, shown here, is yellow; new hybrids are pink, orange, and red.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



Ornamental sages, especially the species originally from the southwestern states, are great garden plants for our hot valley conditions. Hot Lips, shown here, has become especially popular for the bicolor flowers and near-constant bloom. Salvias are especially attractive to hummingbirds.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



Toyon is a familiar California native shrub very suitable for our gardens and landscapes. The regular form has red berries, just turning color now and hanging through the winter until birds eat them. This yellow-fruited strain called Davis Gold is occasionally available.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



That tree with yellow flowers? Formosan flame tree, *Koelreuteria elegans*, is in full flower in October, then sets bright pink-red pods later in the month.



Redwood Barn Nursery

1607 Fifth Street Davis, California



White-crowned sparrows are the bane of the winter garden! They ravage seedlings, especially leafy greens and garden peas. The most effective remedy is to cover the bed with a barrier. Shown here is a simple structure that this avid gardener covers with seedling blanket, held in place with clothes pins.