

Winter Gardening: Not an Oxymoron

By Suzan Ormandy, McDonnell Nursery

Just because your garden is dormant doesn't mean you have to be. To start with, bulbs and bare-root offer two great ways to keep your spirits up and your hands dirty in late winter. Buying and planting summer-blooming bulbs will banish winter blahs as we anticipate showy begonias, dahlias, gladiolus and lilies. These and other bulbs, corms and tubers are available in local nurseries now, but you'll want to wait a month or more to plant if it's a frosty winter. Don't forget bulb food or bone meal to insure bigger blossoms.

January and February mark the beginning of the rose-selling season (bare-root and potted). Jackson and Perkins' Rose of the Year, April in Paris, is a strongly-scented but delicately-hued pink hybrid tea that should live up to its name. David Austin introduces a new English rose: compact and creamy, Windermere promises to be a fragrant, full-petaled beauty, too. Don't overlook recent and old favorites, especially roses well suited to N. California like About Face, Cherry Parfait and Honey Perfume. In addition to roses, you'll want to check out bare-root peonies and clematis – all sure to please if it's a big summer show to which you're looking

forward.

Good nutrition and taste can begin in bare-root form with blackberries, raspberries, strawberries and grapes as well as an array of apples, pears, persimmons and stone fruits that are appearing in nurseries now. The large lots in our Lamorinda area call out for fruit trees, and the wait for them to begin bearing is well worth it, especially with the spring-flower bonus.

Seeds also provide a late-winter gardening opportunity. Cast wild-flower seeds on that problem hillside just before rain and start precious sweet peas inside so you can get them in the ground as soon as frost danger has passed. Veggie and other flower seeds can be started inside soon too, with handy heat/moisture containing kits available to facilitate seed germination.

Winter workshops and shows also keep frustrated gardeners in the groove. Mc-

Donnell Nursery is again offering a free workshop on rose care conducted by the East Bay Rose Society on Saturday, January 26 – not coincidentally at the ideal time for pruning your roses. Call 254-3713 to reserve for this very popular event. Heather Farms also holds hands-on rose pruning demos through March 1. And it's not too early to buy tickets for the March 12-16 S.F. Flower and Garden Show, with tickets available at some nurseries for a reduced early-bird rate. While the exquisite Bouquets to Art show at the de Young in late March isn't technically a gardening event, it does inspire the floral artist in all of us. (Tickets are already for sale, call 415 - 750-3504.)



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Now that the fun stuff has been covered, let's review some more mundane but important winter tasks:

- Spray your roses and fruit trees – trunk, branches and twigs – with a dormant oil and sulfur or copper to control over-wintering insects like aphids, mites and scale as well as diseases.
- Prune roses by Presidents' Day.
- Prune most deciduous fruit and shade trees and vines, and cut back woody shrubs like artemesia, butterfly bush and Mexican sage to encourage dense new growth next summer.
- Feed your citrus trees; at the same time, don't neglect to protect them with permeable blankets and/or sprays when frost is predicted.
- Continue to apply 0-10-10 fertilizer to your azaleas, rhododendrons and camellias for lush blooms in the near future.
- Re-pot those rambunctious cymbidium orchids after blooming. (If you don't feel up to it, nurseries will do the job for you.)
- Tune up your pruners and loppers, another do-it-yourself task, or ask the nursery.

*As a reward for your efforts, you can now curl up in front of your fireplace with a copy of EBMUD's outstanding **Plants and Landscapes for Summer-Dry Climates**. You'll not only be transported by the lush photography but also inspired to plan a more water-wise garden this spring.*

According to EBMUD's web site the book is available at the following Lamorinda stores:

- McDonnell Nursery, Orinda
- Orchard Nursery, Lafayette
- Orinda Books, Orinda

You may also look up a book overview at:

http://www.ebmud.com/conserving_&_recycling/plant_book/plant-book_overview_12web.pdf

