

"Change is in the air!"

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At this time of year, it feels like so many things are changing at once. A new school year is in full swing, the weather is cooler, the leaves on the trees are showing hints of red and gold and many stores have started to display their holiday wares. I feel the change in my garden, too. Aside from the two tomato plants stubbornly hanging on to produce the very last beautiful fruit, everything else has run its course, and it is time to get ready for the next season. Where I grew up, my garden did not have seasons like the weather. We planted our vegetables and flowers in the spring, and when it turned cooler in early September, we cleaned up and bid the garden farewell for the winter. Here in El Dorado County, this time of year does not mean we need to walk away from the garden at all. There are so many things we can do in the garden until the warm weather returns!

The first thing I like to do is tidy up the garden. I remove spent plants and clean up rogue tomatoes. I never get them all, and I actually like the random tomato seedlings that inevitably pop up in the spring because they remind me of how bountiful things were the previous year. Recycle or compost the debris, it's up to you.

Next, I decide what to do with the garden through the fall and winter. The fall is a great time to plant bulbs like garlic or perennial flowers. This year, every box in my garden is getting a full planting of legumes. We will enjoy the peas and fava beans in soups and salads, and in my young daughter's case, eaten fresh off the plants. The rest we will till under to amend and rejuvenate the soil for next year's plants. My daughter helped me pick out seeds at the nursery and plant the first round of legumes. She diligently dug holes and made sure one seed was placed in each hole, and then filled the holes with soil and tamped it down with her little boot. She is not quite three years old, but her fascination with the process and determination to plant every seed we had kept us going for several hours; I have yet to find another activity that will hold her attention for so long!

Now that the garden is tidy and ready for the coming winter, I can sit in my favorite Adirondack chair, decked out in my favorite sweatshirt, gardening boots propped up on the nearest box and reflect. My garden helps me relax and unwind, connect with the world around me and make something beautiful. It provides delicious bounty that this year we have made into salsa, tomato sauce, stuffed peppers, shirazi salad (a Persian tomato and cucumber salad), dried mint, fruit salad and smoothies. The garden is a place for me to spend time with my family. I can teach my daughter not only about growing plants, but concepts like responsibility and perseverance. Every year I learn new things, and every year I feel like I am becoming a better gardener and a better person. Though I watch the sun set on another amazing summer, I look forward to the winter season in my garden.

On Saturday, November 19th, Master Gardeners will present a class on “Growing Berries”. This free, three-hour class is held in the Veterans Memorial Building, 130 Placerville Dr., in Placerville. The class starts at 9:00 a.m.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.org/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.