

April 19, 2017



How Your Extra Garden Harvest Can Make a Difference
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If you are like lots of gardeners in El Dorado County, the last few years of drought have put a crimp in your veggie gardening. Worries about water caused many gardeners to sharply reduce the size of their gardens and, as a result, the size of their harvest. With more water than we have had in years, it's no surprise that many local gardeners are hoping for bumper crops in their gardens this year.

Assuming you can't wait to get out there and plant (it is snowing in Camino as I start writing this in March), Master Gardeners of El Dorado County hope that you will become familiar with Plant a Row for the Hungry, a project that Master Gardeners sponsor on the West Slope.

Plant a Row for the Hungry (PAR) is an international effort of the Garden Writers of America that encourages gardeners to donate extra produce to community hunger projects. For over 10 years, Master Gardeners have provided a link on our website to our local Plant a Row for the Hungry website (<http://par-edc.org/>) which is updated yearly by a team of Master Gardeners. The website is our way of making it easy for local gardeners to find the most convenient place to donate their extra produce. As the name implies, the goal is to deliberately plant more than you can use. But whether you plan it or not, your donations of extra produce are always welcome.

Our website lists a variety of food projects throughout the West Slope, including the El Dorado Food Bank, which is the umbrella agency serving most of the local efforts. Although we list the best drop-off times for each food closet or program, contact info is also listed, because we do encourage folks to check with the organizers ahead of time to be sure those hours are still correct. True confession: I once dropped off some apples outside of SHARE about 15 minutes before it opened. Little did I know that there was a bear in a tree outside SHARE that was watching me, and the apples had been ransacked by the time the volunteers got there. Did I learn my lesson to only go during open hours? I sure did!

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You might have questions about what and how to donate. Recently, the Master Gardener Facebook page highlighted a Michigan State Extension article that provides helpful information.

- It is important to check with the food bank or pantry before delivering any produce.... ask if they need the type of produce you have to donate.
- Always handle the fresh fruits and vegetables safely to minimize the risk of foodborne illness. For example, don't harvest when you are sick and always wash your hands before harvesting
- Offer only high quality, freshly picked fruits and vegetables.
- Do not donate fruits and vegetables that are overripe, have mold, bruising, spoilage or insect damage.
- If you use pesticides in your garden, always read and follow the label instructions.
- Harvest produce early in the morning.
- Wipe as much mud and dirt as possible off of the produce but do not rinse the produce. Rinsing the produce takes off some of the natural protective coating and will cause the produce to spoil sooner than if it wasn't rinsed.
- Do not mix different kinds of produce. For example, don't put cucumbers in the same clean, food grade container as green beans. For example, you might have bags of 4 different kinds of veggies that you put in one large box.

Here is the link to the entire article:

http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/eight_tips_for_donating_fresh_produce_to_food_pantries.

So what if you, or someone you know, would like to help, but don't have a place to garden? The Wakamatsu Farm, which is managed by the American River Conservancy, has a Giving Garden. All the produce grown is given to various food programs throughout our community. Volunteers are welcome to help in the garden. Contact Marianne at (530) 621-1224 to sign up for one of their work days, which are scheduled several times each month.

I always tell people, "If you're having a bad day, just show up at a food closet with a box of fresh tomatoes. You'll leave with a smile on your face that will last the whole day." For more information, check out our local PAR website, where there is a flyer you can print out, as well as a map of the locations.

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. You can also find us on Facebook.

Master Gardeners present regular classes and events. On Saturday, April 22 will be both a discussion and hands-on demonstration on irrigation. With summer coming, it's important to preserve our resources, while protecting our investments in plants and landscaping. Sheri Burke and Cheryl Turner will go over the basics of sprinkler and drip irrigation. This FREE CLASS will be from 9:00 am to noon at Folsom Lake College, A-105/Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive, Placerville.

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Don't forget to note on your calendars, the seventh annual Master Gardener Spring Plant Sale will be on Saturday, April 29. 8:00 am to 2:00 pm at Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville.