

Sacramento Garden Notes

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Garden Notes:

February is a month when gardening chores pick up as more and more comes into growth and needs attention

- a) There is still time to plant Bareroot and Dormant plant material but you should make sure the material is not dried out or sprouting into excessive, spindly weak growth that will frost or burn when put out.. a major problem with packaged material that has been stored in too warm a place like inside a store.
- b) Note that snails and slugs get out early, and will often eat the new shoots breaking ground before you even see them. This is specially true for perennials emerging from the ground such as Lobelia, Hardy Hibiscus, some Lilies, Hosta, young shoots on Brugsmansia (Angels Trumpets) that have frosted back and others with tender, juicy shoots. Be sure to start baiting for snails early to prevent this.
I often get people coming in who think that these items aren't returning, when it is the snails and slugs eating the shoots before they are noticeable that is the problem.
- c) February is a month for planting potatoes, Talini's Nursery on Folsom Blvd has a good selection.
- d) Established Epimediums can be sheared back early in the month to show off the early flowers and bright new foliage



Scilla peruviana – this bulb puts up foliage in fall, blooms in spring and is dormant and can be dry all summer.



This interesting succulent has come to me with 2 different names, Agave Spotty is what Terra Nova calls it, and an old tongue twister that placed it in another genus. For now I'll go with the Agave, it's easier and what it is being distributed by growers as.

In late spring it sends up 5-6 foot bloom spikes of small trumpet shaped flowers of a green and tan color that hummingbirds like.

This Agave is deciduous, losing its leaves in winter and dying back to a large tuberous root to reemerge in spring. I have roughly 6 of them in Gallon containers.

Desperately Need Pots from 6 packs to gallon size!! Flats Also!

Plant Diary:

Dec. 23rd – Hard freeze warnings out last night, but besides a few brown Canna leaves and wilted Nasturtium leaves, the rest of the yard doesn't seem to have frosted as even the annual impatiens are still there. If they had frosted, they would be mushy today.

Dec 24th – Another night of hard frost, the dog park and cars were covered in frost but again, few things in the yard actually hurt. The Angels trumpet had a few curled leaves this morning from frost. Was over at Cynthias this afternoon and same results there, a little frost but that's all.

Definitely shows Curtis Park is a warmer microclimate since channel 3 down Broadway was 25 degrees this morning.

Jan 7th – first of the species crocus opened today. Depending on species, they will open over the next 4-6 weeks, with each species a different color.

The first of the species Tulips have broken ground, as have several varieties of regular season Daffodils and narcissus. The S. elegans is still in bloom, and Ipheons in 3 colors are starting to bloom.

Jan 9th – Frosty mornings and warm DRY days continue in the long range forecast and I notice some things in unwatered areas around are being held back by the lack of water. In watered areas, a lot of things are starting to show signs of flower or growth due to the unusually warm days and the lengthening days. Days are over 30 minutes longer than in late December.

Put down 5 varieties of seed to start, mostly slower growing things for spring. Also potted up some Dahlia tubers under plastic domes to get them up and growing so I can take cuttings.

Jan 12 – more of the species crocus are up and budding. Walking around the area, some of the deciduous magnolias are swelling buds, some of the so called "Evergreen" Pear have

started to bloom and I have Sweet Allysum seedlings coming up in mass.

Visted Talini's recently, and unlike Capital where benches are half empty right now, they had a full selection of plants including a lot of Annie's Annuals stuff, cool weather veggie starts and a great succulent/cacti selection.



Jan 15th – the above picture shows some of the plants that were available yesterday. Several of the devoted gardeners turned out, and as a result I will be turning over \$225.50 to Sunburst tomorrow, plus have funds to buy more soil. It isn't much, but it's a start!

The longer days are definitely prompting root growth on many shrubs, perennials and other plants.

Jan 19th – Flowering Quince are coming into bloom around town. The past few nights of hard frost definitely showed me which spots around the area are most frost protected.

Jan 23rd – first of the Tomato seed is up under the lights, along with some Eggplant, 2 types of Foxglove(Digitalis) and Salvia coccineus. Transplanted some Begonia woolnyi seedlings into pots also.

The upright Sedums are coming up such as S. "Brilliant", S. "Cloud Walker" and the purple leafed S. 'Postmans Pride'.

Two Begonia 'Torsa' that hadn't gone dormant, frosted back in the recent freezes.

The species Gladiolia byzantinum is up about 4", and the species tulips have sent up foliage.

Tips for Growing tiny seeds –

Some seeds and seedlings are very tiny and the main factor in them being lost is them drying out during germination and early stages of growth.

This is especially a problem when starting seed in a dry heated house in winter.

The pictures below shows begonia seed growing in a wine glass covered in saran wrap and seedlings started in a plastic container covered with wrap.



I make sure the potting mix is completely dampened before sprinkling the seeds on the surface. Then I cover the glass with saran wrap sealed on by either wetting the glass rim, or you can use a rubber band.

This closed environment will generally (you still need to check them occasionally) keep the seed and seedling from drying out until they are big enough to transplant using a toothpick into individual containers as shown in the two pictures below.

It can take seedlings from 6 weeks to as long as 4-5 months depending on plant to reach this stage.

Once the seedlings are transplanted, keep them moist and feed occasionally with dilute fertilizer until well established. The seedlings Shown are Begonia seeds started on November 16 of last year and I started transplanting about a week ago (Jan 6th). Assuming all goes well, the first should be ready to go sometime in April.



They are being grown under florescent lights at the moment, if they were under natural light with the short winter days they would take longer to develop.

Also note that if your using natural light, you would have to watch how much sun the closed container receives or you may bake your seedlings.

Growing large seeded plants, such as Bachelers Buttons or Tomato is easier since they can be planted directly into pots to start with, but there is something very satisfying to see a group of seedlings you've grown from seed so small you can barely see it (with glasses!).

Some of the plants with very tiny seed that people often have trouble with include Begonias (dust like), Digitalis, Trachelium, Portulaca, and others.

For those that are small but bigger than Begonia seed you might try seeding them into 6 packs which can be slide in a plastic bag until they germinate, and when large enough are fairly easy to pull apart and plant seperately to grow on.



This picture of a native Heuchera was taken on the way up to Glacier Point in Yosemite National Park on Jan. 1st and just goes to show how little snow was around plus why many Heucherars do well in our climate, they have native blood in them.

About the recent hard freezes – due to the fact many of you had plants damaged by the recent spell of hard freezes, I thought reprinting the article below from several years back was appropriate with a few updates (*in italics*)

Frost versus Freeze: What plants to worry about when:

When do you actually have to worry about your plants and protect them? Many people misunderstand just how hardy many things are so here are a few guidelines:

TENDER TROPICALS – houseplants, many tropicals, many potted and bedding plants used as annuals such as impatiens. These plants generally don't tolerate much frost at all, if any. These need the most frequent protection and some even need protection from colder temperatures even if no frost (examples, coleus and impatiens hate cold (below 50 degrees usually) especially if

damp. *Frozen Impatiens and Coleus should be pulled and added to the compost heap, plants such as Begonias and other tropicals MAY return from the roots.*

TENDER PERENNIALS - this includes those plant that will stand some frost but not hard freeze, usually only being hardy to between 28 to 30 degrees. Included in this are some Citrus varieties, some of the tropical /bedding Salvias (*S. chiapensis, S. africana, etc*), lantana, and things like Brugsmansia (which will freeze back at these temps, but usually *return from the roots, included in this are Pelargoniums (Geraniums), some Salvias, Ajuga, ,* and many of the hybrid (florist type) cyclamen grown for winter color. These are best protected on any night that hard freeze is expected.

Many of you in Sacramento itself and the warmer areas of the foothills grow a number of these easily, but those in the colder suburbs and foothills will tend to lose them unless they are well protected. You can't trust the typical tags/signs at the mass market stores unfortunately, these are technically perennials in their native areas, so they are often marked as perennials but they can't take hard frost.

HARDY PERENNIALS – put in this category all plants that are hardy in USDA zones 7 or lower, including most spring bulbs like Daffodils and Tulips and the hardy cyclamen species like *C. hederifolia*. These plants may go dormant, but easily stand temperatures well below what we generally get, and will even stand temperatures as low as 25degrees in pots. The vast majority of plants I grow are in this category, and I do not cover or protect them unless we have temperatures forecast below 25 degrees.

Many mornings in Winter I can go out and find the pots frozen, yet when they defrost later in the day everything is fine and the plant will go right on growing roots, and even top growth in many cases. The volunteers and others that I show this to are always amazed.

These plants, when grown outside a protected greenhouse environment, produce a natural antifreeze to protect early growth from erratic spring weather.



Creeping Phlox, or *Phlox subulata* is a fairly evergreen creeper with green needle like leaves. It makes a sun loving, drought resistant mat up to 3 ft across and is covered in early spring blooms like above. I have seen this growing in Illinois and Indiana, so it definitely will take cold. The picture was taken in the Old City Cemetery last spring.

This is the reason that when many of you worry about Daffodils sending up early foliage or early crocus in bloom, I tell you it is OK.. its natural, and unless we get really extreme weather, you don't have to worry about it. They are adapted to nighttime frosts and even freezing.

P.S. – early in the season many mass market plants are hurried along in greenhouses to look better.. this prevents the natural anti freeze from developing and so these plants CAN FREEZE if put out and are then exposed to frost even though they normally would shrug it off. It is the equivalent of going unprepared into winter weather. So yes locally grown plants may not be as pretty early in the season, but they ARE hardy and used to our weather conditions having been out in them.



Two old reliable standbys that aren't seen in many nurseries recently as they are "out of fashion". *Lychnis coronarium* (Rose Champion) above and *Centranthus ruber* (Valerian) below, both are easy to grow, drought resistant sun lovers and seed around a bit in the garden. Rose champion is often mistaken for lamb's ears (*Stacys*) when not in bloom, since it has the same fuzzy silver leaves. .



Dierama or 'Angels Wand' has tall 4 to 5 ft spikes of bloom from a clump of leaves resembling Siberian Iris or *Diets*... Slow establishing but worth it, this South African is a hummingbird plant.

Snap Quiz!! Which recovers from minor injuries and changes in surroundings better?

- a) A toddler
- b) A young adult
- c) An older adult

The answer obviously is a toddler, since children grow, heal and adapt to changes better than adults.

What does this have to do with gardening? It puts a simple fact into perspective. That is that smaller, younger plants ADAPT to change easier than older mature plants and having adapted, grows much faster.

This is why, for a gardener with a bit of patience, a young starter is often the better investment than a larger, and more mature plant

Not only does it adapt better to new conditions and have more resistance to infection and stress, but grows faster naturally and has a root system that is larger in proportion to the plant size, which allows it to take off growing faster than a larger plant that often has to sit a year or two to develop a good root system.

This is why planting a smaller perennial, shrub or tree often outstrips a larger version in a relatively short period of time. As an example a gallon size tree and a 5 gallon, at the end of 3 years in the ground, the odds are the original gallon size will be larger than the 5 gallon you planted.

This is because the larger size has to grow a root system in proportion to its top size before it will take off, while the smaller one will take off immediately.

In many perennials and shrubs the difference is even sharper, since those small starters in spring are what a commercial grower would put in a gallon or even 5 gallon to sell you at a much higher price in as little as two to 4 months.

Each year I have a number of new people at the Plant Sales express doubt about buying starters or bare root plants (bare root scares many people because they have had such poor

luck with packaged bare root bought in retailers and they can't tell if it is really alive or not) yet if they do buy bare root, dormant pots or smaller plants, they often come in later express pleasant surprise and shock at how that little "nothing", "empty looking pot", "little stick" or "dried up looking root" became such a nice specimen plant so quickly.

I don't see why they are so surprised, except maybe they don't remember how fast their kids grew, or perhaps they have been misled once too often with dried up material at one of the retail outlets.

Of course another thing smaller plants do is save you money compared to their older, bigger siblings.

I do have to say that you have to start out with healthy youngsters, and not some of the over fertilized, chemically growth retarded items often found in the big chain retailers (I refrain from calling them nurseries, they never GREW a plant, they are retailers plain and simple).

So don't be afraid to try that small starter or bare root plant, you may be surprised!

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a commodity to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." Aldo Leopold

Things to Plant in February – All hardy trees, shrubs and perennials, summer bulbs (except for Caladium), seed for cold tolerant veggies such as carrot, beets, spinach, peas etc, plants of cold loving veggies such as Peas, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Brussel Sprouts and Broccoli.

Seed of hardy annuals and cool germinating perennials such as Sweet Allysum, Scabiosa, and Aquilegia (aka Columbine).

Seed to start indoors this month include Tomatoes, Pepper, Eggplant and warmth loving annuals to set out later.