

BERKELEY HORTICULTURAL NURSERY 1310

GARDENING SUGGESTIONS

January ~ February 2012

Learning about plants enriches our lives. Regardless of age, ethnicity or political leaning, the more we know about our flora, the healthier our world outlook will be. Growing up in a family of plantsmen and horticulturists gave me the inspiration to follow in their footsteps. I once thought that studying western horticulture à la British Gardening Journals, and Royal Horticultural Society publications, would give me a permanent and unchanging knowledge of plants; thereby making me worthy. I now know that notion to be false.

During this season, our most dreary time of year in the garden, I find myself thinking of all the things I have had to “unlearn.”

1) “You must work the soil deeply, incorporating manures or compost in order to have success”. FALSE. Actually the simple act of mulching the soil surface with some form of organic matter will greatly improve the soil texture.

2) “Flowering plants should be deadheaded as soon as possible after blooming” FALSE. How will you or the birds ever get to enjoy the fruits, pods or seeds unless they are allowed to develop?

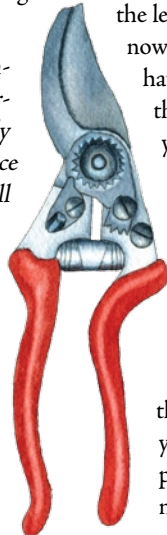
3) “Leaves, twigs and other garden debris should be raked up in order to

keep planting areas clean and free from pests”. FALSE. See #1 (and there are other ways to control slugs.)

4) “You must prune your fruit trees in winter, when they are dormant”. FALSE. A tree pruned at this time will most likely grow rapidly back to its original size...too big for a small garden and too tall to harvest the fruit.

This last item has caused me a great deal of anguish. My conversion came after many years of preaching the virtues of winter pruning. It isn't so much that I was wrong before; after all, this is the time of year when there is the least impact on the vigor of the tree. But now is the ideal time to prune only if you have a large garden with full-size trees, the ability to pick fruit 20 feet above your head, and a way to use or dispose of a pile of branches. How many Bay Area residents have these options? I secretly envy those who do. But they have their work cut out for them. For all the rest of you, consider summer pruning.

Since we at The Nursery have the time and the space this time of year, we offer free workshops on pruning; for winter or summer techniques. Check them out. —Paul





The Seed Corner

It's January and it's cold out in the garden, but it's not too late to give something back to your garden by planting a cover crop. A cover crop will give your soil that extra boost before you plant your spring garden.

🌱 **Fava Beans** ~ These beans accumulate large quantities of nitrogen, which is available to subsequent crops. They have deep taproots that help open up heavy, compacted soils. The leaves decompose quickly but the stems break down slower and help to loosen clay soil. You can eat the beans in spring. We also sell the broad bean, which is the favored edible variety.

🌱 **Annual Ryegrass** ~ Very quick to germinate and very vigorous, it grows well in our Bay Area clay and can tolerate wet soil. In the spring, mow or till under the grass. The grass residue breaks down quickly adding needed organic material to improve soil structure and drainage.

🌱 **Crimson Clover** ~ This clover also fixes nitrogen and produces lots of great humus to work back into the soil. Crimson clover is beautiful and is a great beneficial insect attractant.

🌱 **Winter Cover Crop** ~ This is a mixture of faba (bell) beans, peas, vetch and oats. The beans, peas and vetch fix nitrogen and all help with erosion, producing a wonderful green manure.

These winter cover crops not only add nitrogen and organic material to your soil, but they also protect the soil from erosion and help control weed seed germination and growth. Organic matter will help beneficial soil organisms such as earthworms and fungi. Their by-products are in turn used by other organisms in the soil. Fava beans take a little more work. They should be treated with a bacterial inoculant* and then planted about 1½ inches deep. They are worth the extra work. All other cover crops are fairly easy to plant, just spread the seeds and rake a little soil over them. Your soil will appreciate it.

***Inoculant Instructions:** Place seed in a bucket or bowl, moisten with a small amount of water or milk, sprinkle inoculant onto seed and mix thoroughly until the seed is coated. You cannot use too much inoculant. Mix with seed when you are ready to plant and do not leave the inoculated seed in the sun. —Jeanne

Bareroot Season ~ Short & Sweet

For the best price and selection, buy your deciduous fruit trees bareroot in January and February. Bareroot plants offer more than just a price advantage; they adapt more readily to native soils than container plants do. Young trees are easily headed back at planting time to create a low scaffold and a small, sturdy tree. The varieties we stock perform admirably in sunny East Bay locations. Explore the possibilities of garden-fresh fruit from your own back yard: Attend one of our January pruning seminars or pick up a Backyard Fruit Tree handout at the front counter.

How to Apply Aerated Compost Tea

As you may recall, in the last two issues of *Gardening Suggestions* we have been discussing the benefits of aerated compost tea, and how to make it. This final installment will give you the necessary steps to realize these benefits in your garden.

Once the brewing process is complete it is best to apply your compost tea to the garden as soon as possible. Left un-aerated (stagnant) for a few or more hours, harmful microbes may start to multiply. Your tea should emit an earthy but sweet aroma from start to finish if you have brewed it correctly. If there is even the slightest odor of decay, sulfur, methane, or manure then something has gone wrong and harmful microbes have begun to grow.

It may take the additional step of re-filtering the tea if you want to apply it with a hose-end or pressure tank sprayer, so most people simply use a watering can. Morning application is important with aerated compost tea, and as the temperature of your garden soil heats up with the sun, the warmth keeps the microbes active and busy. This allows them to become familiar with their new homes and of course their caretakers (your plants). Without plants, these microbes could not live; in turn the plants thrive with them. Once the tea is applied the microbes feed on simple sugars that the plant produces near its roots. The continuing microbial decomposition occurs right in the place where the nutrients are most accessible to the plant.

We hope this series has been informative. Please let us know how it works for you. —Noah



The Gardener's Calendar

January Checklist

- Plant cool weather veggies like Cauliflower, Broccoli, Collards, Kale and leaf crops.
- Check your compost to make sure it isn't too wet or too dry.
- Spend a Saturday morning at one of the BHN Pruning Workshops.
- Repot container plants that have gone 2 years or more in the same pot.
- Get a jump on planting CA natives like Ceanothus or Arctostaphylos.
- Prune Roses

February Checklist

- Plant summer flowering bulbs like Begonias, Gladiolus, Lilies and Dahlias.
- Turn in cover crops or green manure.
- Finish pruning full-sized fruit trees.
- Last chance for direct seeding of annuals.
- Select winter flowering shrubs such as Forsythia, Chaenomeles, and Syringa.
- Bareroot berries are a bargain: Strawberries, Blueberries, and Raspberries.

New Arrivals

Diospyros 'Fuyu'

This persimmon is the most popular non-astringent variety. They are firm-ripe, eaten much like apples, and highly ornamental. Be patient as these trees will take 6 to 8 years to bear a good sized crop to maturity, but it will be worth the wait. Spectacular fall color!

Bareroot **\$59.95**

Cercis occidentalis

Western Redbud is one of those trees that when seen in its native habitat leaves a lasting impression. Often this is due to its surroundings, cool, shaded and understory; or hot, dry and exposed. This plant goes either way. Typically, we have a hard time finding larger specimens to offer, but here's the exception.

Bareroot **\$59.95**

Summer Blooming Bulbs

A bit of planning now will keep your bulb garden going through August. Check out our selections of Dahlias, Lilies, Gladiolus, Freesias, Ranunculus, Sparaxis, Tuberose, Callas and more.

Bulk and packaged **call for prices**

Biodegradable Bamboo Pots

Made from bamboo powder and plant fibers, these heat & pressure-molded pots have punch-out drain holes, and come in twelve colors. They last 3 years inside, or 2 years outdoors. A great plastic alternative, they contain no wood or petroleum products.

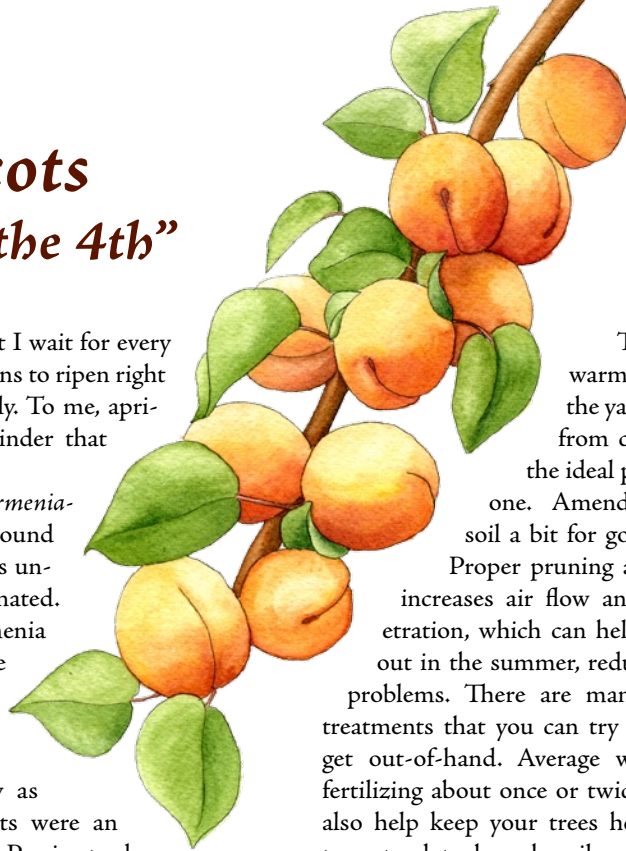
5 to 12 inch dia. **\$1.29 to \$12.99 each**

Apricots Fruits on "the 4th"

One of the fruits that I wait for every summer just happens to ripen right around the Fourth of July. To me, apricots are that sweet reminder that summer has begun.

Apricots (*Prunus armeniaca*) have been grown around the world for so long it is unclear where they originated. It is thought that Armenia could have been where they were discovered first. Some sources say cultivation may have begun in India as early as 3000 BC. Dried apricots were an important commodity on Persian trade routes, and to this day Iran and Turkey are the world's leading producers. Lucky for us, California is the United States leading grower.

Many of us have been fortunate enough to enjoy growing and/or harvesting apricots here in the Bay Area, but they can be a bit finicky due to our mild winters, heavy soil and foggy summers. As with most stone-fruits, apricots require winter chill hours (cumulative temps. below 45°F) for maximum flower set. This is generally not a problem except for some locations along the coast or in the City (S.F.). Because apricots tend to flower early here (late Feb.-March), they can be hindered by frosts, hail or heavy rains. Or sometimes, a late winter heat wave can cause them to bloom too early resulting in little or no fruit production. Most are self-fertile, so they do not require a pollinator.



The sunniest, warmest spot in the yard, protected from cold winds is the ideal place to plant one. Amend hard clay soil a bit for good drainage. Proper pruning as they grow increases air flow and light penetration, which can help "dry" them out in the summer, reducing disease problems. There are many successful treatments that you can try when things get out-of-hand. Average watering and fertilizing about once or twice a year will also help keep your trees healthy. Some trees tend to bear heavily, so fruit-thinning may be necessary to avoid damage to the branches of young trees. And we're not the only ones who enjoy the ripe fruit. You may want, or NEED to protect your trees with some type of netting to keep the birds, squirrels, rats, raccoons...away from your bounty!

These historic trees have always been a garden favorite here. Their blossoms in the spring give way to sweet little summer treats, followed by a great fall color display.

In January we expect to have a good supply of bareroot 'Blenheim', 'Nugget' and 'Royal Rosa' apricots to choose from. Take a look at our Fruit Tree and Small Fruits lists for available varieties with descriptions. Give us a call or come in for a visit if you have any questions or would like to share one of your favorite fruit stories!

Have Fun!

—Che

WEEKEND SPECIALS

January 6-8

Camellias

30% OFF ~ #5 size cans

January 13-15

Primroses

\$2.99 reg. 4.25 ~ 6 packs

January 20-23

Happy Frog Organic Fertilizers

\$8.25 reg. 10.99 ~ 4 lbs.

January 27-29

Azaleas

30% OFF ~ #1 size cans

February 3-5

Dr. Earth Liquid Solution

\$15.00 reg. 19.99 ~ 1 quart bottle

February 10-12

Strawberries

35¢ reg. 50¢ ~ bareroot plants

February 17-19

Vegetable Seeds

25% OFF ~ all varieties

February 24-26

Bareroot Plants

25% OFF

LIMITED TO STOCK ON HAND.
NO DELIVERIES ON SALE MERCHANDISE.

Meet the Staff

We call them the Yard Staff. You know them as the folks who water, weed, trim, transplant, load, unload, and do just about anything else to keep Berkeley Hort running smoothly. Many of these people are in a sort of an immersion program here, learning more about horticulture in order to someday be on our sales crew. Others simply enjoy the camaraderie and ability to be outside in any weather. I've decided in this issue to introduce a couple of these cheerful workers.



Francisco Castro

Best known around here as “the fix-it guy”, Francisco currently has the longest running tenure on our yard crew since starting at BHN in 1992. Born and raised in Guatemala City, he went on to work there at Goldsmith Seeds (now Syngenta), a multinational flower seed company where he held a position as Field Manager during the 1970's. Later, spending a year at a kibbutz, he honed his skills in Agricultural Machinery and Irrigation practices. As luck would have it, turmoil in his homeland (both social and seismic) brought him to the U.S., and to us. The rest is history.

A charming family guy who loves to chat about community events and local lore; say hola to Frannie on your next nursery visit.

Conrad “Leander” Brotz

Over the years, we've had good experiences hiring local high school students to help out with watering, maintenance, moving stock, and assisting with customer carry-outs. This is how we met Leander. In the summer of 2006, before his senior year at Berkeley High we heard about this polite, energetic kid with a “wicked sense of humor”, and decided he sounded like a good fit at BHN. Now that he has finished his undergraduate studies at Vassar, he's back to working full time at the nursery.

He oversees our Aquatic Plant department, including the fish pond and water features so beloved by youngsters and adult shoppers alike. Graduate school is in the planning some-time later this year for Leander, and I'm guessing that he'll also be spending some time with family in Germany. Thank you friend!



Upcoming Free Classes

Saturdays at 10:30am

Rose Pruning
January 7th & 21st



Fruit Tree Pruning
January 14th & 28th

Figs!

“...and they sewed
fig leaves together,
and made themselves aprons.”

—Genesis



The Bible tells us that the foliage used to fashion the First Aprons was plucked from the Fig, a curious choice. The large, deciduous leaves of the edible fig, *Ficus carica*, have a very coarse texture. Fig leaf fabric would have been about as comfortable as sandpaper in summer, and it would decompose and then disappear altogether in winter. But Adam & Eve had no horticulturists or haute couturiers to consult, so they did the best they could. (No doubt if Eve had been able to chat with Yves St. Laurent, the first fabric would have been fashioned from the velvety leaves of *Sparmannia africana* or the California native Thimbleberry, instead of scratchy fig leaves.) We trust the first couple eventually discovered that the Fig tree is a great source of delectable, nutritious fruit.

Please consider Berkeley Hort as your source for Fig trees (and other fruit) this winter. We're offering several Fig varieties. Dark-skinned fruit cultivars are: 'Black Jack', 'Black Mission', and 'Brown Turkey'. Light-skinned cultivars are 'Conadria', 'Excel', 'Desert King', and 'White Genoa'. For details about the trees, please see our information cards, check with sales staff, or refer to the excellent website of the California Rare Fruit Growers, www.crfg.org/pubs/ff/fig.html.

Figs in 9-inch tall sleeves: \$26.95 each
—Margaret

Wasteful redux

Following up on my prior article regarding conservation in the garden, I wanted to share some of these ideas with you.

“We take all of our used 4 inch pots and six packs, and drop them off at community gardens, or school gardens for seed germination”
—Ben in Concord

“When waiting for my toddler's bath to warm, I collect the cold water, and use it for our plants outdoors.” —Heather in Oakland

“All excess food scraps, and plant material gets thrown in our compost bin, or the

green bin. Between recycling, green bin, and compost, we have little to no garbage!”

—Barbara in Berkeley

“I take all my used plastic containers and labels back to Berkeley Hort!”

—(Hopefully Everyone)

Please keep sending your ideas on garden conservation. Living in the bay area, I believe we are leaders in conservation awareness. Hopefully we can make conservation the norm; turning principle into practice. Send your ideas to mail@berkeleyhort.com —TC

Berkeley Horticultural Nursery



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