February gardening is full of chores

By Laura Murphy

February is a very busy month for gardeners, especially if you procrastinated in January like I did. It is a good time to do almost any gardening activity. From pruning to planting, watering to weeding – it all needs doing now. With the warmer weather though, it is a pleasure to get out and get gardening.

Frost Damage

Due to the unusual cold snap we had, many tender plants that were not protected have varying degrees of frost damage. The best approach is to wait and see what leafs out as the warm weather approaches. At that point it will be easy to know exactly how much damage was done. Prune the plant back to where the new growth starts.

If there is no new growth anywhere on the plant, check for new shoots coming up from the roots. Bougainvillea for example will send up new stalks from its hardy roots. If there is no sign of any growth anywhere, the plant may have died and will need to be replaced.

Now is a good time to make a list of plants that were damaged. Keep this list for next year to help you remember which plants need protection when a frost warning is issued. Although it does not happen often, it will happen again. It is better to be prepared than have your special plants damaged or killed.

Pruning

This is the month for whatever pruning you did not get to in January. Do not wait too long or you will be cutting off the new flower buds. It is already too late for most of the spring flowering shrubs such as acacias or cassias. Do a careful job when pruning. Every cut is a wound to the plant and it should be thought about carefully.

Start with removing dead, diseased or damaged branches. Then prune for the health of the tree or shrub. Never remove more than 25% of the plant at a time. Use proper tools for the job and make sure they are sharp and working well. Make clean cuts and never leave a stump, as this will never heal over.

For a hands-on demonstration of tree pruning, meet Craig Geary of the Lake Havasu City Parks Department next Wednesday, February 7th at 10:00 am at the Dog Park next to the London
Bridge Park on the Island. He will show you proper techniques and tools as well as answer any
questions you have.

**Planting**

February is planting time! Now is the best time to plant almost all types of trees and
shrubs. There is plenty of time for them to develop a good root system before the hot weather
arrives. Plant fruits such as bare-root grapes, strawberries and blackberries.

For beautiful late spring color, plant desert marigolds, evening primrose, penstemon and
salvia. Now is also a good time for setting out new ground covers such as Hall’s honeysuckle,
star jasmine, myoporum, and verbena.

Plant your asparagus crowns and horseradish roots now as well as sow seeds of beets,
carrots, radishes, peas, lettuce and spinach. Start warm season vegetable seeds indoors in pots
for transplant later when they weather is a little warmer. Try cucumbers, eggplants, melons,
peppers, squash and tomatoes.

**Fertilizing**

Time to fertilize your citrus trees to make sure you have a good crop this year. Apply as
directed and make sure you water in well. If the foliage is still yellow after the weather warms
up, apply a dose of chelated iron. Scratch a complete fertilizer into the soil over bulbs and
rhizomes such as iris and water in well. Late February is a good time to fertilize your established
roses. Your winter ryegrass lawn can be fertilized now as well.

**Pests**

As new growth appears, check for aphids. If you find some, use a strong blast of water to
dislodge them. If they persist, follow up with an insecticidal soap spray. Watch for signs of the
“good bugs” though. If you find them along with the aphids, let them do their work instead of
resorting to chemicals. This last week in my yard I spotted Green Lacewings, Lady Bugs and
another beetle called Twice Stabbed Beetle. I felt better knowing they were already here,
awaiting the usual spring aphid uprising.

As the soil warms up you may start to see white grubs coming to the soil surface to eat
organic matter. Pick them out and squash them or use an insecticide labeled for grubs. Watch
for other worms such as cut worm is existing plantings where the warmer weather activates
them. Pick them off and squash them as well. A good insecticide to use for worms of any kind
is called Bacillus thurengensis. This is actually a bacterium that infects only worms and is
harmless to all other wild life as well as people. There are several trade names for it depending
on the company that markets it.

**Weeds**
Now is not the time to procrastinate with weeding chores. When weeds are small they are easy to dislodge in the soil. A few minutes with a hoe every day is all it takes as long as you keep at it.

As the weeds get a little bigger though, it becomes hard work to get them out. However you do it, make sure you get them out before their seeds set or you will have an increased weed problem for years to come.

Up-Coming Gardening Events – Mark your calendars

- Tree Pruning Workshop – Wednesday, February 7, 10:00 am. Meet at the Dog Park next to the London Bridge Park just past Javelina Cantina Mexican Restaurant.
- Urban Horticulture Classes – Begins next Thursday, February 9th at Mohave Community College. Class starts at 2:30 pm. Call the college for more information and registration.
- Winter-fest – Saturday and Sunday, February 10th and 11th on McCulloch Blvd.

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