Time to plan, prune plant your garden

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January is a good month for gardeners in Lake Havasu City. With the colder weather, plants are dormant or growing slowly. Pests are not active and the weeds have not started to sprout. The main job this month is Protect plants from possible freezes. It is also a good month to do the Bigger, yearly chores such as pruning and planting.

Planting: January is a good time to plant trees or large shrubs. But don’t wait too long. Plants need time to develop roots and establish themselves before our summer heat. Plant container plants, bare root fruit trees, grapes. Roses and berries. You can also plant cool weather bedding plants and pre-chilled bulbs such as crocus, hyacinth and tulips. Start seeds of eggplant, melons, peppers and tomatoes for transplanting Outside when the weather warms up.

Fertilizing: It will be time to fertilize soon but do not be in any hurry about it. A large dose of fertilizer will encourage new growth. Lush greenery is especially frost sensitive. The best time to fertilize is when you start to see buds swelling and the coldest weather has past. This will ensure the plant has the nutrients it needs to do its best at the right time.

Do not be alarmed at the reddish color in the leaves of some plants now. This is due to the cold temperatures and it will reverse itself when the
Weather warms. If you happen to have wood ashes from a wood burning fireplace, do not use them in the garden. Though this is a good practice, in many parts of the country the desert soil is already too alkaline.

Pests and Weeds: January has very few pest problems. You may see some aphid activity; watch for any signs of scale or spider mites. Take appropriate measures to control them. If you choose to spray dormant trees and scrubs with an insecticide to control eggs and larvae, now is the time.

Germinating weed seeds will start to become a problem, if we get some winter rains. They can be controlled by using a pre-emergent herbicide. This will prevent the weeds from sprouting. Once seeds begin to sprout, this type of herbicide will not work. Switch to a regular type weed killer or get out there and get hoeing.

Keep in mind though that many of those ‘weeds’ are our native desert wildflowers. By learning to identify the seedlings of wildflowers from less desirable plants’ you can allow the natural beauties to bloom and grace your yard every spring.

Pruning: January is the best time for heavy pruning of trees and shrubs. In general plants are dormant and we do not have to worry about heat and sun. You can safely severely prune oleander, Mexican bird of paradise, and other fast-growing scrubs. For spring blooming shrubs such as cassias, emu bushes or Texas mountain laurel, wait to prune after blooming or you will have no blossoms to enjoy this year.

Watering: Irrigation schedules are meaningless this time of year. If we get rains they can supplement or replace your irrigation. Although we do not have heat and sun to contend with, winds can cause plants to dry out. Many people over-water rather than under-water this time of year. Watch for the white buildup of minerals around sprinklers and bubblers. If you see this cut back on the frequency of your watering. Remember that plant roots do need oxygen and it is important that the soil dry before the next watering.
Laura Murphy and Peg Gilson are Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners. For more information contact the Lake Havasu City Master Gardeners by calling their Hot Line at 505-4105. Home garden Day is the first Tuesday of each month from 11-1 at the library.

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