

Farmer Fred - DECEMBER GARDEN CHORES FOR THE CENTRAL VALLEY, FOOTHILLS & BAY AREA

- Protect your in-ground plants near the house from becoming waterlogged by extending your home's rain gutters with flexible pipe.
- Fix any dripping outdoor faucets and then wrap the exposed portion of the water pipes. Insulation that becomes saturated from a leaky faucet is of little protective value during freezes.
- Turn off and drain sprinkler systems by removing the head from the sprinkler at the lowest point of your lawn; or, install a sprinkler end drain.
- Drip irrigation systems should be turned off if a freezing morning is forecast; remove the end plug for drainage.
- Plant from seed directly into the garden this month in the Sacramento area: Vegetables - bok choy, broccoli, kale, collards, lettuce, mustard, peas, radish, spinach. Flowers - California poppy, cornflower, larkspur, poppy, scabiosa.
- Flowering quince, acacias and winter daphne will be the first plants to bloom in a few weeks. These harbingers of spring can be planted now.
- Spring-blooming perennials to transplant now include foxglove, columbine, salvia and gaillardia.
- Winter and spring blooming annuals available at local nurseries this month include primroses, snapdragons, cyclamen, pansies and violas.
- Choose poinsettias with an abundance of dark, rich green foliage that is undamaged, dense and plentiful all the way down to the soil line.
- Clean, sharpen and oil garden pruners before making the first cut of the season.
- Wash mud off shovels and rakes before putting them away in the garage.
- Dormant roots of asparagus and artichokes are available now in some nurseries. Plant in areas that have good drainage, such as raised beds or hillsides.
- Living plants that make good Christmas gifts include herbs. Basil, lavender, lemon balm, marjoram, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, tarragon and thyme grow well indoors, in a sunny window.

- Choosing a living Christmas tree? Varieties that do well in our climate include the Italian stone pine, Aleppo pine, deodar cedar and Colorado spruce.
- Avoid the Monterey pine (*Pinus radiata*) when shopping for a living Christmas tree. The Monterey pine, which has a tough time surviving here in the valley, is subject to bark beetles and pine pitch canker.
- After purchasing a living Christmas tree, leave it outside until a few days before Dec. 25 to keep the tree from becoming stressed.
- Keep poinsettia plants thriving through the winter in your house. Place them in a warm, sunny location, out of drafts. Water weekly; feed monthly through April. Then, transplant them outdoors.
- If you received houseplants as holiday gifts, be sure to remove the foil surrounding the pot to avoid root rot.
- Bare root roses are now appearing in area nurseries. Choose those that list Grade 1 on the label. These will grow more vigorously in their first year, unlike those graded as 1-1/2 or 2.