

## February Monthly Reminders

### Introduction

February is an active gardening month for gardeners. Days get a bit warmer but be prepared for occasional cold snaps as some of our coldest nights have occurred in February. There are still many cool season vegetables to plant this month, and you can prepare for your warm season veggie garden or plant perennials for summer color. This is a great time to be in the desert!

### Maintenance

- Prune any dormant deciduous trees and shrubs you missed in January. Although no pruning is necessary for citrus trees, dead and diseased wood as well as crisscrossing limbs should be removed if the danger of frost has passed (Refer to Pruning Deciduous Shade Trees AZ1139 and Pruning Citrus AZ 1455).
- Watch for cold temperatures – both night and day - and protect plants as needed (Refer to Frost Protection AZ 1002 and Protecting a Citrus Tree from Cold AZ 1222).
- Leave frost damage on plants until the danger of freezing has completely passed. Pruning too early means that vulnerable plants are exposed unnecessarily; new growth may appear which is even more frost sensitive.
- Check your irrigation system for leaks due to freezing temperatures and repair them (Refer to Drip Irrigation: The Basics AZ 1392).
- If you did not prune established roses earlier, do so early in the month. Discard all potentially diseased, dropped leaves and cuttings - do not leave them under the plants or compost them. Healthy leaves are OK to compost (Refer to Diagnosing Problems of Roses in the Landscape AZ 1528).
- Cut back native grasses such as *muhlenbergia* species (Muhly grass) to about 4-6 inches high before new growth starts. Cutting to this height allows you to clean out dead and brown blades of grass and allows for new green growth. Native grasses have the added benefit of not needing to amend the soil or use fertilizer.
- Plan and prepare your summer garden layout and rotate the location of certain vegetables if needed. It's a good idea to keep a garden journal to keep track of these details. (Refer to Planning Your Vegetable Garden).
- Successful vegetable and annual flower gardens require amending the soil each planting cycle. The goal is to have loose, fertile, well-drained soil for these specialty gardens.
  - Prepare garden soils for spring planting of vegetables and annual flowers. Improving soil structure creates favorable conditions for seed germination and root growth. (Refer to Ten Steps to a Successful Vegetable Garden AZ 1435).
  - The recommended amendments include compost, composted manure, and worm castings. These add essential nutrients and are teeming with biological life that helps to build good soil. Adding amendments such as perlite and vermiculite increase aeration and drainage.
  - Do not add wood ash, crushed eggshells or gypsum to the soil. Wood ash raises soil alkalinity, crushed eggshells are unnecessary, and gypsum is not recommended for our gardening conditions. (Refer to Fertilizing Home Gardens in Arizona AZ 1020)
- Winter rains bring weeds, so begin scouting for and manually removing weeds as soon as you notice them.
- Look for aphids – they like cooler temps and new growth. They may appear on other plants besides roses (Refer to Aphids AZ 1635 and Diagnosing Problems of Roses in the Landscape AZ 1528).
- Now is a good time to consider planning or installing active or passive rainwater harvesting (Refer to Harvesting Rainwater for Landscape Use AZ 1344, and Landscape Management Practices to Optimize Passive Rainwater Harvesting and Plant Health AZ 1916).

### Planting

- Harvest cabbage and cauliflower. Monitor lettuce for signs of bolting. If they do bolt, consider letting them set seeds that you can save for next year or donate to the Pima County Seed Library (Refer to the reference below).
- Sow annual seeds outdoors or plant starts for black-eyed Susan, fleabane, gaillardia, gloriosa daisy, Mexican sunflower, nasturtium, primrose and sunflower.

- Plant perennials such as autumn sage, butterfly weed, chuparosa, damianita, desert mallow, desert milkweed, lavender, moss verbena, and pineleaf milkweed (Refer to Flower Planting Guide for the Low Desert AZ 1100).
- Plant bare-root roses near the end of the month. (Refer to Rose Selection and Planting in the Low Desert AZ 1304).
- Continue to harvest most varieties of oranges and citrus (Refer to Oranges for Southern Arizona AZ 1850 and Grapefruit and Pummelo for Southern Arizona AZ 1925).

## Fertilizing

- Continue with mild fertilizing of winter vegetables.
- Fertilize citrus (1st of 3 annual feedings). For oranges, tangerines, and grapefruit, apply 1/3 of the total in January-February, 1/3 in March-April, and 1/3 in May-June. For lemons and limes, the first two applications are the same, but the last 1/3 isn't until August-September (Refer to Diagnosing Home Citrus Problems AZ 1492 and Citrus Fertilization Chart for Arizona AZ 1671).
- Over-seeded Bermuda grass lawns need applications of a nitrogen fertilizer once per month (Refer to A Turfgrass Maintenance Guide for Residential and Commercial Lawns in the Low Elevation Arizona Desert AZ 1817).
- Other uses of fertilizer are not advised. Fertilizers stimulate new growth that will be frost-sensitive.

## Watering

- February rainfall is normally about an inch. If your yard receives significant rain, adjust the amount of water you are supplying your plants. Change only the frequency – not the duration.
- Test your irrigation system for leaks and problems.
- No irrigation for cacti, agave, yucca and desert trees and shrubs through the end of the month.

For more information on this month's topics, the Cooperative Extension offers the following resources, along with a wide range of bulletins and additional documents.

- AZ 1139 Pruning Deciduous Shade Trees. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/pruning-deciduous-shade-trees>
- AZ 1455 Pruning Citrus. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/pruning-citrus>
- AZ 1002 Frost Protection. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/frost-protection>
- AZ 1222 Protecting a Citrus Tree from Cold. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/protecting-citrus-tree-cold>
- AZ 1392-2016 Drip Irrigation: The Basics. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/drip-irrigation-basics>
- Planning Your Vegetable Garden. University of Arizona, January 2010. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/sites/extension.arizona.edu/files/attachment/planningyourvegetablegarden.pdf>
- AZ 1435 Ten Steps to a Successful Vegetable Garden. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/ten-steps-successful-vegetable-garden>
- AZ 1020-2014 Fertilizing Home Gardens in Arizona. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/fertilizing-home-gardens-arizona>
- AZ 1635 Aphids. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/aphids>
- AZ 1528 Diagnosing Problems of Roses in the Landscape. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/diagnosing-problems-roses-landscape>
- AZ 1916 Landscape Management Practices to Optimize Passive Rainwater Harvesting and Plant Health. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/landscape-management-practices-optimize-passive-rainwater-harvesting-and-plant-health>
- AZ 1344 Harvesting Rainwater for Landscape Use. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/harvesting-rainwater-landscape-use>
- Pima County Seed Library. Link: <https://www.library.pima.gov/seedlibrary/>
- AZ 1100a Flower Planting Guide for the Low Desert. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/flower-planting-guide-low-desert>
- AZ 1304 Rose Selection and Planting in the Low Desert. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/rose-selection-and-planting-low-desert>
- AZ 1850-2021 Oranges for Southern Arizona. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/oranges-southern-arizona>
- AZ 1925-2021 Grapefruit and Pummelo for Southern Arizona. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/grapefruit-and-pummelo-southern-arizona>
- AZ 1492 Diagnosing Home Citrus Problems. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/diagnosing-home-citrus-problems>
- AZ 1671-2015 Citrus Fertilization Chart for Arizona. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/citrus-fertilization-chart-arizona>
- AZ 1817-2020 A Turfgrass Maintenance Guide for Residential and Commercial Lawns in the Low Elevation Arizona Desert. Link: <https://extension.arizona.edu/publication/turfgrass-maintenance-guide-residential-and-commercial-lawns-low-elevation-arizona>