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## ASK THE MASTER GARDENER: VEGETABLES FOR FOOD PRESERVATION

**Laurie Meyerpeter**  
Placer County  
Master Gardener

**Question:** I want to do more food preservation this year. I was a newbie food preserver this past summer and I found that my garden didn't seem to be as productive as I needed for pickling and canning. Which vegetables and varieties work best for this goal?

**Answer:** When preserving food, cooks often find it is best to have an abundance of garden veggies ready to can at one time. While some vegetables are very productive over the entire season, they are not as desirable for food preservation because their output is spread out - not concentrated.



Cooks often find that having a concentrated harvest at one time streamlines preservation efforts and is more efficient. Many vegetables have been developed over the years with this in mind, including many heirloom varieties.

When choosing tomatoes, look for "determinate" varieties also known as bush tomatoes. These produce their main crop at one time, although they often continue to produce a smaller crop after the main crop has been harvested.

There are many delicious varieties but a commonly available one is 'Roma'. In addition to being a determinate type of tomato, it's a paste type. Paste type tomatoes have less water and more

"meat", which is important when canning and making sauces.

Many cooks with small gardens prefer bush beans for making 'Dilly Bean' pickles and other preserving because these types of beans produce a heavy crop all at once in a small space. In contrast, pole beans produce a sustained crop through a longer season, but with fewer beans at any one time.

There are many varieties of bush beans; choose the variety that best suits your need. After a few pickings, bush bean production slows and you want to tear the plants out and plant a second crop for harvest later in the season.



*Continued on page 2*

### INSIDE

Help!! Ants in the House!	2
Orchard Mason Bees	3
Bulletin Board	4
Much Ado About Mulch	6
Calendar of Events	7

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THE CURIOUS GARDENER

...A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION AND THE UC MASTER GARDENERS OF PLACER AND NEVADA COUNTIES

Continued from page 1

Any cucumber can be pickled and any pickling cucumber can be eaten fresh but if you want to make pickles, consider planting special pickling varieties.

Pickling cucumbers are easily grown from seed and you'll have many varieties to choose from. For a small garden, consider training them on a trellis.



And don't forget the excessively-productive zucchini. Zucchini can be made into a number of great recipes including zucchini relish, which is better than cucumber relish in my opinion.

For great information on safely canning and preserving your harvest, contact the Master Food Preservers in El Dorado or Sacramento Counties.

### Resources for Canning and Preserving Your Harvest

*Sacramento County Master Food Preservers:*

916-875-6913

Find them on the web with tons of tips for safely canning and preserving at:

[cesacramento.ucdavis.edu](http://cesacramento.ucdavis.edu)

*El Dorado County Master Food Preservers:*

530-621-5506

[cecentralsierra.ucanr.org](http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org)

## ASK THE MASTER GARDENER: HELP! HOW DO I MANAGE ANTS IN MY HOUSE?

A look at the variety of ant control products on the shelves of any hardware store or garden center is enough to confuse any ant-tormented customer. Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help find less-toxic solutions for ant invasions.

### ***What kind of ant do you have?***

Different products work better for different ant species. The most common type of ant invading California homes is the Argentine ant. It is small (no more than 1/8 inch long), uniformly brown, and travels in distinct columns of workers. The *Key to Identifying Common Household Ants* at [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/ants](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/ants) can help identify species.

### ***How are the ants coming into the house?***

Most household ants such as the Argentine ant nest outdoors and come in seeking food or water. A good way to solve many ant problems is to simply plug their entryways. Inspect inside and outside of your house to find out where ants are coming in. You can purchase caulk and sealers to plug these points of entry.

### ***What's drawing ants into the house?***

If invading ants don't find a food source in a house within a few days, chances are they may leave. Removing food sources, including pet food bowls, leaking garbage, or spilled sugary or greasy items is an *essential* part of making a home less attractive to ants. These attractive foods will also make ants less likely to visit any bait stations installed to manage them.



Also, conditions outside can encourage ant invasions. For instance, wood-based mulch up against the house (especially when moist) provides ideal nesting material, and plants (often in pots) that support aphids and other honeydew-producing insects will also draw ants. If you have persistent problems, keep the area directly around your house clear of these attractants.

Finally, movement of ants into the home is often triggered by changes in weather such as the first rains in fall or the first hot days of summer, so expect an increase in ant invasions at these times.

*For more information—including helpful videos—on how to manage ants with less toxic methods, visit the UC IPM ant page at [www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/ants](http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/ants)*

## ORCHARD MASON BEES: SUPERSTAR POLLINATORS

**Lyn Muth**  
Nevada County  
Master Gardener

What's all the buzz about these pollinators? Mason bees, so called because they use mud to close their cells or nests, are also called 'hornfaced bees' or 'blue orchard bees'.

These generally refer to the species *Osmia lignaria*. They are solitary bees, do not live in colonies and have no queen to defend, which makes them non-aggressive.

They do not make honey, wax or any products of interest to humans; however, the pollination service they provide is highly valuable.

The USDA Agricultural Research Service says, "With a strong preference for fruit trees, mason bees are highly efficient pollinators; in fact, just 250-300 females will pollinate an entire acre of apples or cherries." Read more about USDA research into mason bees here:

<http://www.ars.usda.gov/Research/docs.htm?docid=18333>

What's so amazing about this small bee, smaller than a honey bee yet larger than a fly, is that it is much better at pollinating than a honeybee!

Honey bees forage in a three mile radius and the Mason bees stay close by, in your yard or your neighbors. It does not sting unless provoked and even then the sting is similar to a mosquito's.

They are shiny, blue-black bees that move quickly, then hover in the air until darting to another location.

The female Mason bee visits flowers to collect pollen for its young. She forms a small ball of pollen and nectar in the back of the nesting tube and lays an egg on the ball.

She then collects mud to form a cell partition and repeats the ball-egg laying process until she reaches the mouth of the tube where she caps the end with mud, usually laying five - ten cells in the tube.

Starting the life cycle in the spring, adult males emerge from the tubes first, usually 2 weeks before the females, then the females emerge and they mate and the cycle begins again.

This emerging often coincides with the redbud (*Cercis*) bloom. Activity continues for four to six weeks and then the adults die. During the summer, larvae develop inside the nests, make cocoons and become new adults, resting in the cells. In fall, the adults become dormant as they go into hibernation.

The bees require some cold temps before spring in order to break dormancy. If we experience a warm spell in late winter, say January, the bees are apt to become active. Since this is too early for them to be effective as pollinators, they can be kept in a cold dark place, or even better, in the bottom of a refrigerator until the right trees are in bloom.

They need three days to warm up following refrigeration, then they can be put back in their proper place. A good location would be in the morning sun, under the eaves. Some place with protection. Avoid the north side as this is too shady and cool.

Mason bee nest are simple to build using small bamboo, paper tubes or rushes in a 5/16 size. The optimum length for the tubes is six inches.



Place the tubes in a coffee can or anything available to hold them together.

Place the nest out in March and get ready for these little pollinators to do their job!

### References:

"Orchard Mason Bees", Washington State University Extension: <http://gardening.wsu.edu/library/inse006/inse006.htm>

The Xerces Society  
[www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org)

UC Davis Bee Research Facility  
<http://beebiology.ucdavis.edu/>

## BULLETIN BOARD

### "Bite Me!"

The Nevada County Master Gardeners present:

### Annual Tomato Tasting and Open Garden Event!!

Vote for your favorite Tomato, tour the garden and attend 2 great workshops:

11am—Noon—Composting  
Noon—1pm—Raspberries

**SATURDAY, SEPT 8**

**10am to 1pm**

1036 W. Main, GV (NID grounds)

### UC Davis Postharvest Website

This website was created for handling fruits and vegetables after harvesting. There is great information on how to store fresh fruits and vegetables for better taste and longevity at home.

[http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/produce\\_information/StorageFreshProduce/](http://postharvest.ucdavis.edu/produce_information/StorageFreshProduce/)

### Visit the Master Gardeners Online!!!

For information or to submit a question...

Placer County Master Gardeners:  
[pcmg.ucanr.org](http://pcmg.ucanr.org) or on Facebook

Nevada County Master Gardeners:  
[ncmg.ucanr.org](http://ncmg.ucanr.org) or on Facebook

## 2012 Nevada County Fair

Come on down to the Barnyard Safari!! The Nevada County Master Gardeners will be in the Ag-sperience area ready to answer your gardening and composting questions.

August 8-12, 2012

For more information, visit the website at: [www.nevadacountyfair.com](http://www.nevadacountyfair.com)

**Barbara Brown-Neville**Nevada County  
Master Gardener

## MUCH ADO ABOUT MULCH...

An unpleasant sounding word, “mulch” – sort of like a bad taste in your mouth might sound - like *yuck*.

Mulch, simply defined, is a protective layer of opaque material placed over the surface of the soil. When added to your landscape or garden, mulch can make a big difference between thriving and struggling plants and trees.



Depending on your choice of material, mulching is an easy process and relatively inexpensive to install. The presence of mulch in the growing area reduces irrigation costs, is environmentally friendly, and saves time and energy for the gardener.

First, let's clear up some confusion in terms that many gardeners have.

**Mulch and mulching are quite different from compost and composting– yet related.**

Compost, the organic end product of the natural decomposition process of organic materials, is often applied before mulching and used for amending soils to increase organic matter content.

Composting is that process by which organic materials become compost.

Now, MULCH is applied on top of the soil, not mixed in. It provides moisture retention for the soil, erosion control for the soil, temperature protection for roots, weed suppression and – if organic materials are utilized – improved soil content and structure.

Clearly, mulch provides many benefits for the enlightened gardener and for the root areas of their plants and trees.

The key difference between “mulch” and “compost” is the weed suppression effects. Mulch smothers weed seeds and helps keep them from germinating while compost provides a lovely start for weeds with little to no suppression.

Mulch also provides a finishing look to gardens, plant beds and even lends a specific type of ambiance to landscaping design where desired.

Mulching is water-wise - a big deal in the gardening world - because water is an increasingly scarce and costly natural resource essential to healthy crops and plants. The use of mulch in home gardens and commercially helps conserve water because it reduces 10% to 50% of its normal evaporation from the soil.

A related factor, soil penetration may also improve as the tilth of the soil is modified by the breakdown of organic mulches. This increases both water and oxygen pathways to roots, improves the structure of the soil and helps to provide favorable environments for worms and other soil dwellers.

Another way mulches help conserve soil structure is to minimize soil compaction resulting from human or mechanical traffic in or near the root zones of plants.

Compaction closes off essential air and waterways in the soil from

reaching the roots of plants and trees.

Have you ever noticed a drop of water striking dry soil? How its impact causes it to splatter? When there are quantities of water, either rain or overhead irrigation, soil erodes and runs off the productive part of the garden or landscape and is lost from the garden. Mulch materials prevent water drops from directly hitting the dry dirt thereby minimizing soil loss.

Mulch makes weed management easier for the gardener. Its role is to prevent sunlight from germinating weed seeds present in most soils, leaving fewer for manual pulling or crowding out desired plants.

In much the same way, mulch acts as root protection for temperature extremes. It modifies both the cold temperatures of winter and the hot ones of summer by acting as a kind of insulation against the temperature extremes.

Both organic and inorganic materials can be used for mulch. . . the possibilities boggle the mind.

There are many types of commercial processed mulches ranging from recycled tires to man-made yardage to various sizes and colors of chipped bark, even crushed or chunks of rock or stone. Also rice hulls and straw, manure, thickly layered newspapers, and, of course, composted organic materials and living ground covers can be used separately or in combination.

Continued from page 5

For example, in large areas, layered newspapers can be used as a base for chipped and shredded bark.

In areas with deciduous trees, the undisturbed or unraked annual leaf drop actually becomes the mulch. For instance, oak leaves forming a thick mat provide mulching benefits and protect the large root zone of the tree.

Maple leaves can be a bit of a problem because they often form an impenetrable mat preventing the water from reaching the soil at all.

Pine needles are also a welcome addition to the world of organic mulching materials and like most leaves become more effective mulches when they are cut up using a lawn mower or shredding device and redistributed.

Obvious benefits of inorganic mulch such as rocks, crushed stone, recycled tires, etc., is that they do not require frequent replacement. Indeed, replacing them can be quite a chore!

However, due to the heat retention qualities of most inorganic mulching materials, care in placement on landscaped areas containing plants whose roots are near the soil's surface is needed to prevent damage from intense summer heat.

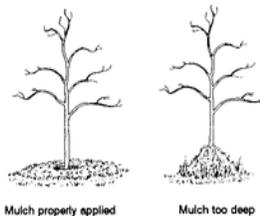
On the other hand, mulching with organic materials such as planting a groundcover or spreading compost, rice byproducts, wood chips, etc will require periodic replacement due to natural organic decomposition over time.

A positive side benefit of organic compost materials is that they gradually provide compost to enrich the soil. A word of caution, undecomposed materials from the harder parts of plants, such as bark and wood chips tend to rob nitrogen from the soil during their decomposition period so care must be taken that plants in these areas have adequate nitrogen.

Using a variety of mulch materials can provide accent and extra interest to the landscape. The downsides of garden and landscape mulching are few.

Perennial weeds, nutsedge for one, are not discouraged. Unwanted pathogens may be transmitted to the soil from diseased chipped materials . . . it is good to know your source. Cocoa mulches have been found to be a health hazard for dogs so choosing another material would be advisable if you care for pets.

When mulching, it is very important to keep any and all materials a few inches away from the main stem or trunk of plants to prevent crown rot on trees. Also, it is a good practice to always keep mulch materials a minimum of 18 inches away from structures.



Remembering that the goal is to prevent sunlight from reaching the soil surface will determine how much and how deep to apply mulch.

It depends on the size of the material used and the exposure of the area to the sun. For example, when using coarse materials such as large sized wood chips, the

desired depth can be four to six inches.

If lawn clippings or other fine materials are used, the depth can be kept to two to four inches. If the area is previously mulched, is shaded or mostly so, it is not necessary to go to the same depths.

Using a variety of mulch materials can provide accents and add interest to the landscape. Additional rewards of mulching are improving the environment by recycling organic and inorganic materials, preserving natural resources such as water and soil, improving the health of plants and trees and saving the gardener time, money and energy.

So you see, there is good reason to make "much ado about mulches" and the results are so varied and beneficial.

**References:**

*California Master Gardener Handbook* UC ANR Publication Number 3382. Published 2002

*Passionate Gardening. . . Good Advice for Challenging Climates.* Lauren Springer & Rob Proctor Published 2000 by Fulcrum Publishing; Golden, CO

**FREE** Brochures available through UCCE Placer and Nevada Counties' Master Gardener programs:

- Basic Composting
- Worm Composting
- Let's Look At Bin Plans
- Recycling Tips for Gardeners



# SUMMER 2012 CALENDAR



## JULY

Saturday, July 7th from 8am-Noon at Auburn Farmers Market (near Auburn Courthouse):  
***Come visit the Placer County Master Gardeners and ask your gardening questions!***

Saturdays in July from 8am-Noon at Grower's Market at North Star House in Grass Valley:  
***Come visit the Nevada County Master Gardeners and ask your gardening questions!***

Saturday, July 14th from 9am-11am at PC Master Gardener Garden (11477 E Ave. Auburn):  
***Composting and Vermiculture***

Saturday, July 21st from 8am-Noon at Auburn Farmers Market (near Auburn Courthouse):  
***Come visit the Placer County Master Gardeners and ask your gardening questions!***

## AUGUST

Saturday, August 4th from 8am-Noon at Auburn Farmers Market (near Auburn Courthouse):  
***Come visit the Placer County Master Gardeners and ask your gardening questions!***

Saturdays in August from 8am-Noon at Grower's Market at North Star House in Grass Valley:  
***Come visit the Nevada County Master Gardeners and ask your gardening questions!***

August 8 through 12, at Nevada County Fairgrounds in Grass Valley:  
***Nevada County Fair—Come and visit the Nevada County Master Gardener booth!!***

Saturday, August 11th from 9am-11am at PC Master Gardener Garden (11477 E Ave. Auburn):  
***Fall and Winter Vegetable Growing***

Saturday, August 18th from 9am-Noon at NC Master Gardener Garden (1036 W. Main, GV):  
***Start Your Fall/Winter Garden NOW!***

Saturday, August 18th from 8am-Noon at Auburn Farmers Market (near Auburn Courthouse):  
***Come visit the Placer County Master Gardeners and ask your gardening questions!***

Saturday, August 25th from 9am-11am at PC Master Gardener Garden (11477 E Ave. Auburn):  
***Growing an Herb Garden***

Saturday, August 25th from 10am-Noon at NC Master Gardener Garden (1036 W. Main, GV):  
***Seed Saving Basics***

**For More Information, call Placer MG Hotline (530)889-7388 or  
 Nevada Co MG Hotline (530) 273-0919**





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