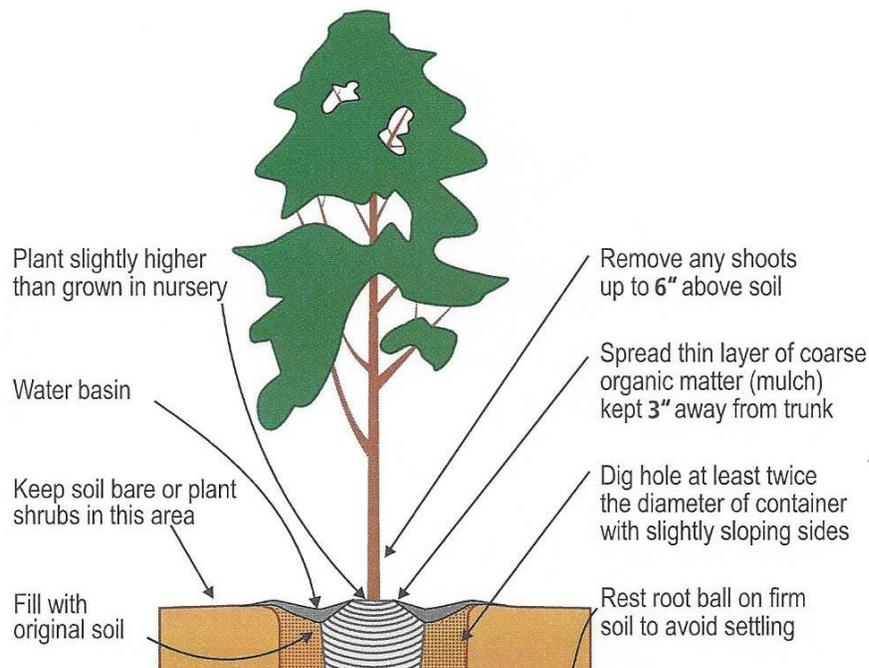


# OCTOBER 2020 GARDENER'S CORNER

by Cate White, SJ County Master Gardener

October, with its cool crisp mornings and warm afternoons is one of my favorite months. It's also a busy time in the garden, since it's the perfect time to put in new plants, especially trees and shrubs. In my last column, I discussed surveying your yard for sick or unhappy plants that need to be removed or planted in a different spot. Planting now gives plants time to settle in and start growing good root systems before the weather gets really cold, so they are ready to take off in the Spring.

When planting any plant, it's important to practice proper planting techniques. Dig the planting hole 2 to 3 times wider than the plant's root ball, but shallow enough so that it rests on undisturbed soil. This prevents settling that can eventually cause your plant to sit too low, leading to problems with stem rot. Keep the sides of the hole rough and irregular, promoting root growth into the surrounding soil. Remove the new plant from its pot carefully. Gently loosen the roots, or score the root ball with several shallow vertical cuts. Remove damaged or circling roots. Avoid buying pot-bound plants with roots circling inside the pot. Set the plant in the hole so that the crown is just above soil level, then backfill with the soil you dug out, breaking up large clods. Be sure to firm the soil around the roots, filling in air spaces. It's best not to enrich the soil used to fill the hole, as that discourages the plant from extending its roots beyond the enriched area. Water thoroughly and mulch to within several inches of the trunk. Mulching plants too close to the trunk is another cause of rot. If you are staking a new tree, use a least two stakes and don't tie up too high, since the tree needs some freedom to move so that it can develop a strong trunk. Wait several weeks before fertilizing.



**Proper Planting Technique**  
*ucanr.edu Illustration*

As I mentioned in the September column, putting in plants that attract pollinators brings life into your garden. In addition to the plants mentioned in that column, native plants are a sure way to invite lots of wildlife into your yard. They have the additional advantage of being a perfect fit to our climate, and often have low water needs. The California Native Plant Society is a great resource for researching native plants. They maintain a website, [calscape.org](http://calscape.org), that allows you to enter your address to see an extensive list of plants well adapted to your area. The list includes both annuals and perennials, and ranges from trees to groundcovers. There are pictures of each plant, plus a description of its growth habits, water and light needs. A quick check to see what plants they recommend for our area includes large shrubs, such as the Blue Elderberry, *Sambucus nigra*, and the California Wild Rose, *Rosa Californica*. There are also grasses, and many smaller plants such as a variety of annual and perennial lupines. The San Joaquin Native plant Society is the local branch of CPNS and you can find their website at [nsj.cnps.org](http://nsj.cnps.org). Last but not least, the Sunset Western Garden book lists many native plants that do well in garden landscapes.



**Blue Elderberries**  
*ucanr.edu photo*



**Silvery Perennial Lupines**  
*photo nps.org*

So, enjoy our beautiful October weather and renew your garden with some carefully chosen plants. Then, sit back and wait for your reward when new growth begins this spring!

## October Garden Check List

- Continue planting winter flowering annuals, such as pansies, Iceland poppies, dianthus, primroses, stock, and decorative kale. Cyclamen also offer beautiful winter color. These are all great in pots for spots of color.
- Plant trees and shrubs now to get their roots established during cool weather
- Deadhead roses and feed one last time.
- Once nighttime temperatures are at 50 degrees or less for two weeks, start planting bulbs such as daffodils, freesia, hyacinth, Dutch iris, grape hyacinth and anemone.
- Keep citrus trees trimmed up 24" from the ground to prevent brown rot.
- Start using bait to control for snails and slugs
- Adjust watering systems according to weather conditions