In Northern California we are fortunate to have two long seasons for planting – spring and fall. If judged by nursery sales, most planting by homeowners is done in the spring. The warmer days of spring after a cold winter pull us outside - into the garden and onto hiking trails. Spring carries a sense of urgency – a quickness – a fast moving timeline marked by a continuous procession of blooming plants – one following the other. The mahonia’s golden yellow flowers open early in February/March and not far behind are the Ribes and redbud. Before we know it spring has sprung and Table Mountain is awash in fields of lupine and poppies. There are places to go and wildflowers to be seen. Sometimes the gardening can be rushed and frenetic or just neglected.

Fall, however is much quieter – the gradually cooler days bring a calm from the heat of summer. Our time spent in the garden can be more deliberate. I figure after the third week of September we can count on temperatures dropping frequently into the pleasant 80’s and then slowly but surely downward. We can usually rely on nearly two months of fine planting weather - hopefully interrupted by the occasional rains.

Planting early in the fall, September-October, while soil temperatures are still warm encourages strong root growth. Once the soils become cold and damp young plants establish their root systems more slowly. While it is fine to plant in November and December (if the soil is not too wet) plants will take a little longer to become established.

To make the most of the planting seasons, good planning and preparation makes our garden projects more doable. In my garden there are two fall projects that will be ready for planting when the weather cools. This spring I made some drastic changes in my front garden. A dense 40’ maple was taken down which significantly increased the sunlight.
through the **Seasons**

The tree removal was followed by a water leak that required some deep and lengthy trenching with shovel and backhoe leaving a bare landscape where there once was garden. Though I fully intended to replant in April, the rush of spring work caught up with me leaving little time or energy to work in my own garden.

My second fall project is more intentional – the transformation of what used to be a vegetable garden space into what I’m calling a meadow-to-be. This neglected, weedy area was enclosed by an unattractive deer fence which made for a less than desirable view from the bedrooms. Over time my vision became one of grasses and wildflowers - a quasi meadow. So I decided to plant in the fall, plugs of different native grasses and scatter some wildflower seed.

To plant an area with small plugs and seeds, the soil should be relatively weed free otherwise the young plants will be overgrown by the vigorous non-native grasses that germinate with the fall rains. Solarization was the method I opted to try to rid the soil of weed seeds. Over a few weekends in early June I took down the fence, removed the few woody shrubs and graded the soil. Before laying down the clear plastic, the area was well watered. It is the moisture in the soil that helps to steam and sterilize the top few inches of soil. When I’m ready I will remove the plastic, disturb the soil as little as possible (this would bring up more deeply buried weed seeds) and plant, keeping in mind young plants and seedlings will need to be consistently watered until the rains come.

I’ve talked with a number of people in Chico who have been thinking ahead by turning off the water to their lawns this summer – with the intent to plant drought tolerant plants in the fall. This has saved them from having to spray herbicides or use the labor intensive method of sheet mulching to kill the lawn. By thinking ahead they will have a clean canvas from which to create a new and more climate appropriate landscape.