LATE WINTER IS THE TIME TO PRUNE FRUIT TREES & SMALL FRUITS

In northeast Missouri, mid-February into March is the time to prune fruit trees and small fruits like grapevines, brambles and blueberry plants. My colleague, Tim Baker in the northwest region, wrote an article that I would like to share with you on how to prune fruit trees.

When considering major corrective measures for fruit trees, think “light,” especially if you are dealing with a peach tree. Basically, you want to open up the center of the tree so that light can get into the middle...an “open vase” shape. Branches that cross over other branches should be removed, for example. With apples and most ornamental trees, you want to retain a central leader, with side branches coming out. Getting good light penetration to the fruiting branches is still important. Again, branches that cross over other branches should be removed, especially if they are rubbing on good branches, or are just in the way. With most fruit trees, you usually want to control the height of the tree, so keep that in mind. If the tree has a central leader, you will need to cut it off at some point.

Remember when pruning fruit trees that you are removing potential fruit as you prune, and you are therefore reducing your crop. That is because the fruit buds were formed last summer, and as you remove wood, you remove fruit. So while pruning is necessary, and even beneficial for the tree, don’t get too carried away and remove your entire crop. After you have finished pruning, you may want to apply a dormant spray, especially for fruit trees. As the name suggests, these sprays are meant to be applied in the dormant season. It’s not a good idea to apply them when the tree is getting ready to leaf out, since this may injure the new leaves. Dormant sprays are used to control certain insects on fruit trees.

Here are a few pointers about pruning tools. First of all, buy good quality pruning tools. This will make the job easier and more enjoyable. High quality pruning tools should last a lifetime, especially if they have parts which can be replaced if they wear out. Good tools with high quality metal will also sharpen better and hold that sharp edge through your pruning tasks.

Hand shears are one of the most important pruning tools. They come
in several styles, but horticulturists usually recommend bypass or scissors types. These will provide the cleanest cuts, compared to other styles, such as the anvil types. You will probably need some lopping shears as well. These also come in both bypass and anvil styles, and again, the bypass is best. These are used for larger cuts, and should therefore be strong and well-made. When you are confronted with even larger cuts, you will need a pruning saw. These again come in a multitude of styles. I like the curved type that cut as you pull the saw toward you. They can be found in “razor-cut” models, which are a joy to use on green wood. Pole pruners are also available. These may have some bypass loppers on the end of the pole, along with a pruning saw. These are great for those high cuts that invariably need to be made, but offer safety by allowing you to stay on the ground instead of climbing a ladder. It’s always a good idea to keep your tools sharp. And if you are pruning a plant that you know has been diseased, you should clean your tools periodically with alcohol so that you don’t transmit the disease to other plants.

If you would like more information on pruning trees, we have several guide sheets on how to perform this important task. Call your county extension center to request these guides.

Source: Tim Baker, horticulture specialist, northwest region, University of Missouri Extension

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SALT DAMAGE TO PLANTS

It has been a mild winter, which may worry some gardeners and farmers. The winter before the severe drought of 2012 was mild with very little snow, and this winter is looking like a repeat of that year. If the ground appears dry around your evergreens such as pines, arborvitae, spruce, hollies and other needled and broadleaf evergreens, consider giving them some water.

During the winter months we need to try to protect our landscape plants the best we can from salt damage. Most plants are susceptible to salt, but there are some plants that are more salt tolerant than others. During a snowstorm, big trucks go along the streets, plowing and spreading salt. You may also spread salt or ice-melt along your sidewalk, walkway and driveway. Some of that salt and ice-melter can end up on your lawn. Salts can kill your grass and make soil barren so that only weeds come back. As soon as you can in the spring, flood the affected area to wash the salt or ice-melter off the grass and leach it through the soil away from the grass root area. After two or three heavy waterings, you can replant the area if necessary with grass seed.

The greatest damage to trees and shrubs is on the side that faces or is adjacent to the street, sidewalk, or driveway. The plants may weaken or die as salt levels accumulate. Some plants, like the White Pine, Spruce and Fir are especially sensitive to salt damage. Salt damage to evergreen plants causes needles to turn brown from the tip to the base. Deciduous plants may be damaged, but this will not be noticeable until the spring when plants do not leaf out or bud properly because of bud damage. Rinse all plants exposed to salt with water in the spring. Although it is very difficult to reverse salt damage, you can do your best to prevent it by using something other than salt for a deicer. Commercial products that contain potassium chloride have a lower burn potential than ones that contain sodium chloride. Sand and kitty litter will work as an aid to prevent someone from slipping on the ice and do not damage plants, but they do not work as well as an ice-melt compound.

Prevention and modification are the best approaches to reduce salt damage. You can erect a barrier, using burlap or landscape fabric, in an effort to keep the salt from entering a landscape bed.

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ALL-AMERICA SELECTION WINNERS

All-America Selections is pleased to feature the complete list of All-America Selection Winners. All National and Regional Winners have been tested for garden performance by the AAS judges. After the judges submit their scores, those varieties that perform best over all of North America become AAS National Winners. Entries that performed particularly well in certain regions are named AAS Regional Winners. Once these new varieties are announced as winners, they are available for immediate sale and distribution. Home gardeners will find seeds available from their favorite catalog or online seed source or as young plants at their favorite garden retailer. There are too many to list with a description in this article, so to see the 2015 winners go to http://all-americaselections.org/. If you do not have internet access and would like the list, contact me at 660-665-9866.
CARE FOR VALENTINE’S DAY FLOWERS

The most popular day to give flowers is fast approaching with the arrival of Valentine’s Day on February 14. Many people will be sending that special someone a bouquet of fresh flowers, and, by far, roses are the most popular gift. Proper care is important for extending the life of fresh flower arrangements. Below are a few guidelines which will make this symbol of love last longer:

**Water is vital:** Keep the vase or floral foam soaked with water at all times. Add fresh water daily and use warm water as this aids in uptake. If the water turns cloudy, replace it immediately with fresh water. If possible, re-cut the rose stems every day by removing 1 to 2 inches. Use a sharp knife. If at all possible, this cut should be made under water as this allows the stem to draw in water instead of air.

**Keep Valentines flowers cool:** Warm temperatures shorten the life of the blooms. Avoid direct sunlight and heating vents. Warm air from ceiling fans will cause the flowers to fade. Appliances like televisions and computers give off heat causing the flowers to dry out.

**Floral trick for wilted or droopy flowers:** Try this trick if the flowers start to wilt, remove the stem from the arrangement and re-cut the stem. Next, submerge the entire flower in warm water. Leave it in the water for one to two hours. This treatment should perk the flowers up and extend its life for a couple days. This trick works well for cut roses.

**Care of flowers received wrapped in paper or a box:** If you give or receive loose stems of flowers keep them cool as long as possible before delivering to your sweetheart. Fill a clean vase with water and add flower food from the florist. Follow packet instructions for mixing.

Before placing the stems in the vase remove all foliage that will be below the waterline. Leaves in water promote bacterial growth which decreases life. Re-cutting the stems under water with a sharp knife is recommended before placing in the vase. Follow the same guidelines for arrangements for longer lasting flowers.

**Care for potted flowering plants:** Potted plants are also a popular gift. Like arrangements, keep them in a cool location and avoid heat drafts or dry air for longer color. Most plants will require even moisture so check the soil daily and water if dry to the touch. Do not let the plants stand in water. This will harm the root system. Potted flowering plants will last anywhere from a few days in the case of forced bulbs to several weeks. For example, under good conditions, expect azaleas, exacum cyclamen, and kalanchoes to last up to four weeks.

**Source:** Dennis L. Patton, County Horticulture Agent, K-State Research and Extension/Johnson County

SPRING FORWARD WORKSHOP APRIL 18

The Spring Forward Gardening workshop will be held Saturday, April 18 from 9:30-3:30 at William Matthew Middle School in Kirksville. This year there will be sessions on cooking; growing plants in containers; butterfly and bird migrations; raised bed gardening; selecting the best trees and shrubs for your landscape; what’s in my food and reading food labels; natives, invasives and pollinators; and do it yourself garden projects. Registration forms will be available after February 15, by calling the Adair County Extension Center at 660-665-9866 or downloading a form from the website at http://extension.missouri.edu/adair. The cost is $20 and includes lunch.

If you would like to present a Do It Yourself Garden Project in the DIY session, please submit a paragraph about the project and a photo if you have one to schutterjl@missouri.edu. Four will be selected to present. You will have 15 minutes to demonstrate and talk about your project. Project proposals must be received by Friday, March 13. You will be notified by Friday, March 20 if your project has been chosen.

MARCH 21 BEGINNING GARDENER WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Jacob’s Vineyard and Winery, Kirksville, MO
9:00-9:15: Welcome & Introductions
9:15-9:45: Soil & Site Preparation
9:45-10:15 Seed Starting
10:15-10:45 Herbs
10:45-11:00 Break
11:00-11:15 Garden Structures
11:15-11:45 Care & Maintenance of the Garden
11:45-12:00 Harvesting
12:00-12:15 Raising Backyard Chickens
12:15-1:00 Food Preservation
GARDENING TIPS FOR FEBRUARY

Ornamentals
- Water evergreens if the soil is dry and unfrozen.
- Inspect summer bulbs in storage to be sure none are drying out. Discard any that show signs of rot.
- Winter aconite (Eranthis sp.) and snowdrops (Galanthus sp.) may push up through snow to bloom now.
- Take geranium cuttings. Keep foliage dry to avoid leaf and stem diseases.
- Sow seeds of larkspur, sweet peas, Shirley poppies and snapdragons indoors now for transplanting into the garden later this spring.
- Winter aconite (Eranthis sp.) and snowdrops (Galanthus sp.) may push up through snow to bloom now.
- Seeds of slow-growing annuals like ageratum, verbena, petunias, geraniums, coleus, impatiens and salvia may be started indoors.
- Start tuberous begonias indoors now. "Non-stop" varieties perform well in this climate.
- Dormant sprays can be applied to ornamental trees and shrubs on a mild day while temperatures are above freezing.

Fruit
- Inspect fruit trees for tent caterpillar egg masses. Eggs appear as dark brown or gray collars that encircle small twigs. Destroy by pruning or scratching off with your thumbnail.
- Collect scion wood now for grafting of fruit trees later in spring. Wrap bundled scions with plastic and store them in the refrigerator.
- When pruning diseased branches, sterilize tools with a one part bleach, nine parts water solution in between cuts. Dry your tools at day’s end and rub them lightly with oil to prevent rusting.
- Begin pruning fruit trees. Start with apples and pears. Peaches and nectarines should be pruned just before they bloom.
- Grapes and bramble fruits may be pruned now.
- Established fruit trees can be fertilized once frost leaves the ground. Use about one-half pound of 12-12-12 per tree, per year of age, up to a maximum of 10 pounds fertilizer per tree. Broadcast fertilizers over the root zone staying at least one foot from the tree trunk.

Vegetables
- Run a germination test on seeds stored from previous years to see if they will still sprout.
- Start onion seeds, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts and cabbage indoors now for transplanting into the garden later this spring.
- Season extending cold frames, hot beds, cloches and floating row covers allow an early start to the growing season.
- If soil conditions allow, take a chance sowing peas, lettuce, spinach and radish. If the weather obliges, you’re rewarded with extra early harvests.

Miscellaneous
- When sowing seeds indoors, be sure to use sterile soil mediums to prevent diseases. As soon as seeds sprout, provide ample light to encourage stocky growth.
- Repot root-bound house plants before vigorous growth occurs. Choose a new container 1 or 2 inches larger in diameter than the old pot.
- To avoid injury to lawns, keep foot traffic to a minimum when soils are wet or frozen.
- Branches of pussy willow, quince, crabapple, forsythia, pear and flowering cherry may be forced indoors. Place cut stems in a vase of water and change the water every 4 days.

- Missouri Botanical Garden -

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 3: Salt River MG meeting, 7 p.m., Sesquicentennial Building, Palmyra, MO
February 7: Beginning beekeeping workshop, Macon High School cafeteria, 9-4, $35 per person, proceeds support North Central Missouri Beekeeper’s Association. Contact Bill or Tammy to register, 660-214-0132 or georges@chbeekeeping.com. Limited to 30 people. Jim and Valerie Duever will teach this workshop.
February 21: Beginning beekeeping workshop, Adair County Extension Center, 503 E. Northtown Rd., Kirksville, 9-4. Cost-$15 per individual or $25 per couple or two people from the same farm, includes handouts and lunch. Call 660-665-9866 for a registration form. Jim and Valerie Duever will teach this workshop.
March 21: Beginning Gardener workshop, 9-1, Jacob’s Vineyard and Winery, Kirksville, MO. Geared toward those wanting to learn the basics of growing and preserving their own food. Free, but please RSVP. Call 660-665-9866 or email schutterjl@missouri.edu. Schedule on page 3.
March 27: Gardening Workshop in Brookfield. More details in March issue.
April 18: Spring Forward Into Gardening, William Matthew Middle School, Kirksville, 9:00-3:30. Registration forms available soon.

Garden Talk!
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