

FRUIT TREE PRUNING WORKSHOP

For those who have fruit trees – or want to have fruit trees – a free community workshop on tree pruning will be held at the Numana Community Garden on Gordy Street, between 6th St. and 9th St. in El Dorado. The workshop will be held at 10 a.m. Friday, March 6th. Larry Crouse, Butler County Extension horticulture agent, will lead this hands-on training. Dress appropriately, there will not be a rain-out date.

Pruning is essential for a tree to thrive and produce abundant fresh fruit. Participants will learn how to set the base structure of an apple or peach tree and the reasons behind pruning. Crouse will discuss pest control problems that fruit growers encounter. After a demonstration, Crouse and other Butler County Master Gardeners will supervise as participants try their hand. Participants will want to bring their own pruning tools, bypass pruners are preferred over anvil type. Hand shears and loppers are the tools of choice.

The apple orchard used in this workshop is part of the Numana Community Garden. These fruit trees will provide fresh fruit for people in need in our community. There is **no cost** for this tree pruning workshop. Any questions about this event can be answered by calling the Butler County Extension office at (316) 321-9660.

Seven-son Flower

This large shrub is finally starting to receive the recognition it deserves. A native of China, seven-son-flower was first collected in 1907, named in 1916, and then languished in obscurity. Another expedition to China in 1980 resulted in a collection of viable seeds that were propagated and distributed to several botanical institutions and nurseries. Over the years, it has slowly become more widely planted. Numerous characteristics contribute to the attractiveness of this plant. Leaves are a dark, glossy green and are rarely bothered by pests. Creamy, white flowers appear in late summer when few plants are in bloom. The inflorescence is distinctive in arrangement and effect. Though each individual flower is quite small, they are borne in a panicle with six flowers tiered in a whorl with the seventh terminating the inflorescence. Panicles are born on the tips of branches. After the flowers fade, fruit appears with surrounding sepals. Color changes from green to red and persists for 2 to 3 weeks. This plant is actually more attractive in this post-bloom period than in flower. Though often grown as a large shrub, Seven-son Flower can be trained as a small tree and reach 15 to 25 feet in height. Exfoliating (peeling) bark is attractive with the inner bark being lighter. Hardy to Zone 5, seven-son flower prefers moist, well-drained soils.

Cut Back Ornamental Grasses

March is a good time to remove dead foliage from ornamental grasses. Grasses green up earlier if foliage is removed and are more attractive without a mixture of dead and live leaves. A number of tools can be used including hand clippers, weed whips (if the foliage is of a small enough diameter), weed whips with a circular blade, or even a chain saw. Use the top of the chainsaw bar to cut so the saw doesn't pull in debris and clog. Also, it is often helpful to tie foliage together before cutting so it doesn't interfere and is easier to dispose of. Burning is another option — but only if it is safe and legal to do so. Note that these grasses may not burn long, but they burn extremely hot. Even so, the crown of the plant is not damaged and new growth appears relatively quickly. If the center of the clump shows little growth, the plant would benefit from division. Dig up the entire clump and separate. Then replant the vigorous growth found on the outer edge of the clump.

Pruning Deciduous Shrubs

Gardeners are eager to get out and do something in the landscape this time of year. One chore that can be taken care of during March is pruning certain shrubs. Often, gardeners approach pruning with trepidation, but it is not as difficult as it may seem. Remember, not all shrubs need to be pruned (i.e., witch hazel), and certain shrubs, which will be identified later in this article, should not be pruned this time of year. Shrubs are pruned to maintain or reduce size, rejuvenate growth, or to remove

diseased, dead or damaged branches. Deciduous shrubs are those that lose leaves each winter. Evergreen shrubs maintain foliage all year and include yews and junipers.

Deciduous shrubs are placed into three groups:

- Those that flower in the spring on wood produced last year;
- Those that flower later in the year on current seasons' growth; and
- Those that may produce flowers, but those flowers are of little ornamental value.

Shrubs that flower in the spring should not be pruned until immediately after flowering.

Though pruning earlier will not harm the health of the plant, the flowering display will be reduced or eliminated. Examples of these types of plants include forsythia, lilac, flowering quince, Vanhoutte spirea, bridal wreath spirea and sweet mockorange. Shrubs that bloom on current seasons' growth or that do not produce ornamental flowers are best pruned in March. Examples include Rose-of-Sharon, pyracantha, Bumalda spirea, and Japanese spirea. Pruning during the spring allows wounds to heal quickly without threat from insects or disease. There is no need to treat pruning cuts with paints or sealers. In fact, some of these products may slow healing. There are three basic methods used in pruning shrubs: thinning, heading back, and rejuvenating. Thinning is used to thin out branches from a shrub that is too dense. It is accomplished by removing most of the inward growing twigs by either cutting them back to a larger branch or cutting them back to just above an outward-facing bud. On multi-stemmed shrubs, the oldest canes may be completely removed. Heading back is done by removing the end of a branch by cutting it back to a bud and is used for either reducing height or keeping a shrub compact. Branches are not cut back to a uniform height because this results in a "witches-broom" effect. Rejuvenation is the most severe type of pruning and may be used on multi-stem shrubs that have become too large, with too many old branches to justify saving the younger canes. All stems are cut back to 3- to 5-inch stubs. This is not recommended for all shrubs but does work well for spirea, forsythia, pyracantha, ninebark, Russian almond, little leaf mock orange, shrub roses and flowering quince.