

## **PREVENTING SUNSCALD ON THIN-BARKED TREES**

Many young, smooth, thin-barked trees such as honey locusts, fruit trees, ashes, oaks, maples, lindens, and willows are susceptible to sunscald and bark cracks. Sunscald normally develops on the south or southwest side of the tree during late winter. Sunny, warm winter days may heat the bark to relatively high temperatures. Research done in Georgia has shown that the southwest side of the trunk of a peach tree can be 40 degrees warmer than shaded bark. This warming action can cause a loss of cold hardiness of the bark tissue resulting in cells becoming active. These cells then become susceptible to lethal freezing when the temperature drops at night. The damaged bark tissue becomes sunken and discolored in late spring. Damaged bark will eventually crack and slough off. Trees often recover but need TLC — especially watering during dry weather. Applying a light-colored tree wrap from the ground to the start of the first branches can protect recently planted trees. This should be done in October to November and removed the following March. Failure to remove the tree wrap in the spring can prove detrimental to the tree.

## ***Questions on Ornamental Grasses***

We are starting to receive questions on whether it is best to cut back ornamental grasses in the fall or spring. As a rule, ornamental grasses should not be cut back while green because they need time to move the energy found in the foliage into the roots. Even when browned by cold weather, most gardeners will leave the foliage until spring because of the interest it adds to winter landscapes. Early March is the preferred time to cut back these plants. However, dry foliage is extremely flammable and should be removed in the fall from areas where it is a fire hazard.

Another question we often receive is whether we can divide ornamental grasses in the fall. Spring is the preferred time because divisions done in the fall may not root well enough to survive the winter.

## ***Garlic Planting Time***

October is a good time to plant garlic (*Allium sativum*) if you want large quality cloves next summer. Apply 3 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet and mix into the soil before planting or fertilize according to soil test. Plant individual cloves point up and spaced 6 inches apart and 1 to 2 inches deep. The larger the clove planted, the larger the bulb at harvest. Water in well and mulch with straw to conserve soil warmth and encourage good establishment. Harvest will not occur until next summer. Test dig when the lower 1/3 of the foliage is yellow. If the cloves have segmented, it is time to harvest. If they haven't segmented, wait another week or two. Elephant garlic (*Allium ampeloprasum*) should also be planted now. It is a plant with a milder garlic flavor and is actually a closer relative to the leek than to true garlic.

## ***Fertilize Spring-flowering Bulbs***

October is the month that existing beds of spring-flowering bulbs such as daffodils and tulips are fertilized. If bulbs have been fertilized in the past, there is often plenty of phosphorus and potassium in the soil though it is best to take a soil test to be certain. If the soil needs phosphorus and potassium, use a complete fertilizer (such as 10-10-10, 9-9-6, etc.) at the rate of 2.5 lbs. per 100 square feet. This would equal 1 rounded teaspoon per square foot. If phosphorus and potassium are not needed, blood meal makes an excellent fertilizer. It should be applied at the rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per square foot. Turf fertilizers such as a 27-3-3 or 30-3-3 can be used, but cut the rate by a third. If there is difficulty in determining exactly where the bulbs are planted due to the lack of foliage, fertilizing in the spring rather than the fall is acceptable. However, it is important that the plants are fertilized when the foliage first shows. Waiting until the bulbs are flowering is too late as the roots have already begun to shut down.

## ***Fall Armyworms on Turf***

Though we had some fall armyworms last year, the last time we had a significant outbreak on turf was August, 2000. Armyworms are so-called because they invade fields or landscapes as large groups and can cause a lawn to turn brown seemingly overnight. Young worms are ½ to ¾ inch long. Mature ones are 1 ½ inches long. Body color may vary from green to almost black but light stripes will be visible along the length of the body. Look for a whitish inverted "Y" on the top of the black head. It normally takes 2 to 3 weeks to progress from egg to pupa. The adult is a moth. Armyworm damage can resemble drought damage but close inspection of the turf will reveal the larvae. Look for active feeding during early morning or evening hours or on cloudy days. Larvae feed on foliage and the resulting dehydration causes turf to quickly brown. Normally, armyworm damage does not kill established turf but may if populations are high enough. Thick infestations of fall armyworm can damage turfgrass crowns which will kill turf.

Carbaryl (Sevin), acephate (Orthene, Acephate), spinosad (Conserve; Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew; Borer, Bagworm, Leafminer and Tent Caterpillar Spray) and other insecticides are effective caterpillar killers. Treat in late afternoon, when the caterpillars are likely to begin feeding. Do not mow for 3 days after treatment.

## ***Fruit Planting Preparation***

If you plan to develop or add to your fruit garden next year, now is a good time to begin preparing the planting site. Grass areas should be tilled so grass does not compete with the fruit plants for soil moisture and nutrients. Have the soil analyzed for plant nutrients. Your local K-State Research and Extension agents have information to guide you in taking the soil sample. From that sample, the agent can provide recommendations on what and how much fertilizer to add to correct nutrient deficiencies. Organic materials such as compost, grass clippings, leaves, hay, straw or dried manure, can be tilled into the soil to help improve its condition. Time and weather conditions generally are more suitable in the fall than in the late winter and spring for preparing soil. If fruit plants can be set by early April, they will have developed a stronger root system to support plant growth than they would if planted later. If there are only a few plants to be planted, consider tarping each planting area to guard against a wet spring, delaying planting after plants are shipped and received. Also, fruit tree planting can be done in the fall but plants may need to be watered during the winter if the weather is warm and dry.