February 5th, 2024

In this Issue:
• Wet Soil Concerns
• Pruning Fruit Trees
• Paper Pots

The Grapevine

Too Much of a Good Thing?

The moisture we have received this winter is a welcome change after two years of drought conditions. While the moisture is a welcome relief saturated soil can bring with it some concerns and issues. The good news is we have decent moisture in our topsoil even if the subsoil layer is still pretty dry, the bad news is the moisture may reveal some problems.

While the weather has been nice and it’s tempting to get outside and work in the yard it’s best to wait till the soil dries out a bit. Walking on wet soil in the lawn or garden can lead to compaction issues over time. Try to keep your foot traffic or even pet traffic to a minimal level while the soil is saturated. It’s also important to wait to work the soil with a tiller till after the soil has at least partially dried out otherwise you will damage the soil structure and could cause it to form a crust on the top. If the soil crumbles easily when you pick up a handful it is dry enough to work, if it is still sticky you should wait. I would also wait to take a soil test or let the soil dry out before bringing it in for the best results.

Saturated soil can also lead to tree failure. Normally, the weight of the branches is translated down the trunk of the tree and into the large structural roots, called the root plate however, in extreme weather events, when the soil is completely saturated and the wind is blowing, the movement of the tree causes the wet soil to take on a gravy-like consistency. Once this begins to happen, the tree’s roots are no longer held by the soil but are rather slipping and sliding through it. Before toppling, some trees might exhibit a lean. Leans can be identified by heaving or mounding soil near the base of the tree on the opposite side of the lean. This is caused by the root plate pulling out of the soil and pushing the soil upward. If you see this with any of your trees contact a professional to inspect it and determine if it can be saved.
Pruning Fruit Trees

There is nothing better than eating a peach or cherry picked straight from the tree in the summer. Growing up my family had a small orchard of apple, peach, plum, and cherry trees that we would pick from to freeze so we could enjoy that fresh summer taste all year round. While growing fruit on trees sounds like it should be easy, there are some important steps and care that we have to do every year to prevent diseases and keep our trees as healthy as possible. One of the most important of those steps is to prune your fruit trees regularly. Early February through March is the best time to do some maintenance pruning on our fruit trees.

One of the most important tips for keeping your fruit trees healthy and productive is to prune them yearly. Make sure to prune them when the branches are warm rather than frozen. You can damage your tree by pruning frozen wood. Some of our fruit trees such as pears or plums will need little pruning while others such as peaches will require regular pruning to maintain the strong structure needed to support fruit. When pruning it is important to remember what your goals are:

- The first goal is to develop a strong branch structure to support the fruit. Trees with a weak structure are likely to break with heavy fruit loads or ice storms.
- The second goal is to allow light and airflow into the tree canopy. Sunlight is needed to set fruiting buds for the next year while airflow through the canopy helps to reduce the chances of disease in your trees.
- The third goal is to control the tree size. Smaller trees are easier to prune, pick fruit from, and spray for diseases and bugs. Many fruit trees you can purchase now are dwarf varieties but it’s still important to keep fruit trees the size you want and can maintain.
- The final goal is to remove diseased, dead, or broken branches. High winds, ice storms, diseases, heavy fruit loads, insects, and wind storms can all damage the trees. Removing those broken branches can help speed up the healing process and prevent future problems.

When pruning fruit trees there are some general recommendations that we make. With any pruning cut you make, be sure to prune back to the collar of the branch or a bud so you don’t leave a stub. The stubs will eventually fall off but you have lengthened the healing time needed for that plant.

- Remove branches that have narrow attachment angles, less than 45 degrees, to the tree. These branches are likely to break from the weight of fruit or ice. Cherry trees are notorious for having brittle branches and narrow crotch angles so it’s important to prune those trees when they are young to develop a strong structure.
- Remove water sprouts, the branches that grow straight up inside the middle of the tree, and suckers that grow from the base of the tree. These branches won’t produce fruit and simply clutter up the tree.
- If two branches rub together, remove one of them. Those wounds open the tree up to disease and insect issues.
- Remove branches growing back into the tree. These could rub against other branches and they clog up the tree’s canopy reducing the airflow.
- Remove a maximum of 30% of the tree’s canopy a year. Pruning back too severely can lead to an increased number of water sprouts and reduce the amount of fruit that you will get. If you have a very overgrown tree it’s best to trim it back over several years rather than all at once.
Fruit Tree Pruning Cont.

Each type of fruit tree has a different growth pattern and needs different pruning techniques. See these recommendations from Ward Upham below:

- **Peach and Nectarine**: Peach and nectarine require more pruning than any other fruit trees because they bear fruit on growth from the previous year. Not pruning regularly results in fruit being borne further and further from the center of the tree allowing a heavy fruit crop to break major branches from to the extra weight. Prune long branches back to a shorter side branch to prevent this breakage.

- **Apple**: Apples tend to become overgrown if not pruned regularly. Trees that are not pruned often become biennial bearers where they have a huge crop one year and none the next year. This type of bearing is not ideal when we want fruit consistently. Though pruning helps, fruit often needs to be thinned as well. The goal is an apple about every 6 inches. Spacing can vary as long as the average is about every 6 inches.

- **Cherry, Pear, Plum**: Light pruning is usually all that is needed. Simply remove branches that are causing or will cause a problem according to the general recommendations above. You can use “spreaders” on young branches to improve the crotch angle for a stronger tree.

It’s best to start pruning fruit trees right after they are planted to develop a strong support system and to keep the trees to a manageable size. If you are starting with an older, overgrown fruit tree you can still bring it back to a manageable state. It’s important to remember that it will take several years of pruning to get the tree back into shape since we can remove no more than 30% of the tree at a time (excluding dead wood). The first step before doing any pruning is to ask if the tree is healthy and sound enough to justify the time and effort. If you decide to keep the tree, use the following steps to renovate the tree over three to four years.

- **During the first year**, work to shorten the overall height and width of the tree to make it easier to work with. Cut the main scaffold limbs back to a strong, well-positioned side shoot or riser. Thin out the upper third of the tree by removing dead branches, crossing limbs, and hanging branches to allow better light and air movement into the tree. Stop when you hit 30% of the tree being removed.

- **For the second year**, remove most of the large, vigorous new shoots that are at the top of the tree to keep the height down. This year you will determine the final height of the tree and prune down to that height. Thin out shoots on the upper half of the tree and try to space out the main limbs to distribute the new fruiting wood uniformly. If you haven’t hit the 30% mark yet you can shorten the limbs around the outside of the tree to allow better light exposure to the lowest limbs.

- **For the third year**, return to the top of the tree and remove about half of the new shoots near your heaviest pruning cuts. Thin out the inner branches to allow adequate air movement and sunlight penetration into the tree. Continue to work with the branches to spread the fruiting wood evenly over the entire tree from the bottom to the top. This will help prevent the tree from leaning or falling over during storms. After this year you should be able to prune the tree as recommended above to maintain the shape you created.

Pruning fruit trees can be intimidating if you have never done it, especially if you have an older or overgrown tree, but the benefits to your orchard and fruit trees in terms of fruit production and reduction in disease or insect issues will be noticeable. Remember you don’t need to apply anything to the wounds of your fruit trees, research has found that actually slows the healing process rather than helping. If you have any questions please contact the Extension office.
Newspaper Pots for Seedlings

Newspaper pots are an environmentally friendly way to plant seeds indoors this winter. The best part about them is that you can customize the pot to the size you want depending on the type of seedling you are starting. While there are products you can purchase to make the pots, they are easy to DIY at home.

**Supplies:**
- One sheet of newspaper
- Glass jar, aluminum can, or pop can
- Scissors

**Instructions**

1. You will need one sheet of newspaper (approximately 22” by 12”) per pot. Fold the newspaper lengthwise (long edges together) to form a strip and press along the folded edge.
2. Set the jar or can on its side at one end of the strip, with the base about 2 inches up from the cut edge. Roll the newspaper around the can to create a cylinder.
3. To create the base of the pot, starting at the outer seam, fold the free end of the cylinder inward. Make three more folds inward to create the base of the pot, pressing firmly to make the folds as flat as possible.
4. Slip the pot off of the can or bottle. Starting at the outer seam, fold the top 1/2 to 1 inch of the pot inward to create a stable rim.
5. Fill the pot with seed-starting potting soil and plant your seeds. You now have biodegradable pots to plant outdoors.
PLANTING SEEDS OF CHANGE:
5 ECO-FRIENDLY GARDENING EVENTS

GARDEN MAGIC UNVEILED
Feb. 10th, 10–11:30 am

SPECIAL STORYTIME
TIME, SEED BOMBS
March 12th, 10:30 am

SEED EXCHANGE
March 12th, 5:30–7:00 pm

PLANT EXCHANGE
May 16th, 5:30–7:00 pm

FREE FOR ALL AGES!
To register, please email: tlarsen@andoverlibrary.org

EARTH DAY VIDEO CONTEST
Submission April 19th
Screening: April 26th, 6 pm
YOUTH LAWN MOWING CLINIC

Thursday, March 14th, 2024
Butler Community Building
200 N. Griffith - El Dorado, KS
Registration Begins at 9:20 a.m. Clinic Will Be 9:30 - 11:30 a.m.

You Will Learn:
✓ Lawn Mower Safety
✓ Lawn Mower Maintenance
✓ Proper Care for Various Types of Turfgrass
✓ Business Skills Necessary to Run Your Own Lawn Mowing Business

PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED
CLINIC COST IS $10

This clinic is designed for youth in 5th through 9th grade

REGISTER NOW
316-321-9680
collae@ksu.edu
Kokedama Class

Join us for a fun evening learning the art behind the Japanese Kokedama. The experts from Simple Morea will be teaching you how to make your very own Sansevieria Kokedama to take home. The cost of this class is $35 and pre-registration with payment is required. To register please visit this link: https://forms.gle/Lc17WbfPh9jz2hHXA or contact Calla at callae@ksu.edu

Tuesday, March 19th, 2024
7:00 p.m.
Butler Community Building
200 N. Griffith - El Dorado, KS