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The Grapevine

Storing Garden Seed

This weekend as I was unpacking a box I found the container of vegetable seeds and my seed starting supplies. Every year I love starting my tomatoes, peppers, vining crops and some of my flowers from seed under grow lights. For me there is something very satisfying about watching my plants grow and eventually produce in the garden. As I looked through the box I found some of my favorite varieties that I've grown for several years and I noted that the date on some of these seed packs was from 2018. Unfortunately, much like other products that we buy, our garden seeds do have a shelf life and expiration date. Most garden seed will be viable for approximately 3 years under cool, dark and dry conditions. Some of our smaller seeds such as carrots are really only viable for 1 to 2 years. There are always exceptions that will last longer but your germination will be lower the older the seeds get.

Starting in mid-December I plan to check the viability of some of my older varieties by placing 5 to 10 seeds inside of a damp paper towel and checking it every week. Once a seed sprouts I'll remove it from the towel and throw it away. After three weeks, depending on the germination length of the seed, I'll determine the percentage of seeds that germinated to see if the seed is still viable for the coming growing season. If I have a variety that doesn't have very good germination it might be time to toss that package and buy a new one or plant extra seeds of that variety knowing that I probably will only get one out of the group to actually germinate. If you saved seeds from your garden this year be sure to store them properly to increase your germination in the spring. Keep all seeds away from fruit if you store them in a refrigerator as the ethylene from the fruit as it ripens can have a negative impact on your seeds

Volunteer Trees

One of my calls from last week was on how to control the suckers that come up after you cut a tree down or cut off volunteer trees. There are several trees in our landscape that are notorious for sprouting suckers when they have been cut off. These include Siberian elm, red bud, all varieties of maple trees, ash trees, locust and many more. The best way to control suckers on volunteer trees is to pull them when they are small rather than cutting them off. If you can't pull them or if you're like me and find them when they are too big to pull there are some ways to prevent suckers from coming back to haunt you. Note that when we say volunteer trees, we mean those that come from seed rather than suckers that originate from the roots of an existing tree. The recommendations given in the remainder of this article are designed to kill these volunteer trees. Using herbicides on suckers will damage and very possibly kill the original tree. Trees that commonly produce suckers include tree of heaven, honeylocust, black locust, hackberry, western soapberry, cottonwood, aspen, poplar, willow and boxelder.

There are a couple ways to control suckers, the first is to keep cutting them off at the ground level till they have used up their store of energy. This could be a couple cuttings or a couple years depending on the tree. The second way is to use chemical. You can spray the sucker and then let it die prior to cutting it off or you can treat the stump after you have cut the tree down. Triclopyr and glyphosate are the herbicides most commonly available to homeowners. Triclopyr is found in many brush killers and glyphosate is found in Roundup as well as numerous other products. Read the label before purchasing to make sure that a cut stump treatment is listed. Most often the undiluted product or lightly diluted product is applied to the stump immediately after cutting. A paint brush is often used for the application though some people will dip their pruning shears in the products immediately before cutting. Regardless, it is important that the stump is treated immediately or at least within 5 minutes. Note that a paint brush with foam rather than bristles is less likely to drip. Trees do not need to be actively growing to be controlled. Actually, this time of year is a very good time to treat as long as applications are made when the temperature is above freezing.