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Graham County Gardening Newsletter

December 2005

Getting Ready to Prune?

Over the next few weeks many of the deciduous shade trees will be losing their leaves and going dormant. This period of dormancy is the optimum time for pruning deciduous shade trees as well as fruit and nut trees. Most trees do just fine without any pruning at all, but if you decide to prune your tree there are several items to keep in mind. Anytime you prune you are causing a wound in the tree that must heal and will always result in some response from the tree. Some of the typical risks include, an increase in sprouting, susceptibility to insect infestation, and potential entry points for decay organisms. Before you prune, make sure that the benefits outweigh the potential risks that the tree might face.

There are basically four reasons you would want to prune a deciduous shade tree.

1. To remove dead, weak, diseased, or broken limbs.
These limbs are not productive for the tree and pose a potential hazard if they were to break out of the tree and fall to the ground.
2. To remove crowded and crossing limbs.
These limbs have the potential to rub together causing wounds in the tree and entry points for infectious pathogens.
3. To remove hazards in the landscape such as branches in walkways or paths.
This one is obvious. If you have a tree that overhangs onto a public walkway, you are responsible for keeping that walkway clear and free of any obstructions.
4. To remove branches to shape, direct, or control growth.
This is best done when the trees are young. If you want to plant a tree in an area that might be restrictive to the growth of the tree, such as overhead power lines, choose a tree that has a smaller growth habit.

Pruning is one of the most commonly misunderstood tree care procedures. Topping of deciduous shade trees is a common practice that leads to unhealthy trees with weak and poorly attached limbs from vigorous sprouting around the cut. It also stresses the tree due to the removal of all the foliage, which produces food for the plant. Proper pruning should never remove more than one-third of the trees' wood at any one time.



Randall Norton, Ph.D.
Extension Agriculture Agent

For more detailed information on gardening call the Safford Ag Center at 928-428-2432 or Graham County Cooperative Extension Office at 928-428-2611.

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POINSETTIA

If you purchase or receive a poinsettia or Christmas cactus for Christmas, the following information will assist in care and continued life of the plant.

In their native habitat, Mexico, poinsettias are winter-flowering shrubs that grow up to 10 feet tall. Poinsettias won't reach such stature in cooler climates, but they will live long after the holidays are over and bloom in succeeding years. Here's how to buy a healthy plant and keep it growing.

Buying a Poinsettia

When buying poinsettias, choose plants with fully colored bracts—too much green around the edges indicates immaturity. The small green or yellow berries, which are the plant's true flowers (called "cyathia"), at the center of the colored bracts should look fresh.

Choose plants with dense, dark green foliage that extends all the way down to the soil line. Stems should be stiff. There should be no sign of wilting or breaking.

Be wary of plants wrapped in plastic or foil sleeves—this can distort the true shape of the plant. Check to see how the plant looks without the sleeve before buying.

To get your plant home healthy, cover it loosely with a large bag before going outside to protect it from winds or temperatures lower than 50 degrees F.

When you get the plant home, put it where it will receive at least 6 hours of bright daylight. Temperatures between 60 and 70 degrees F are ideal; keep it away from cold drafts and excessive heat (from fireplaces, radiators, etc.)

When the soil in the pot feels dry to the touch, water just enough so that a bit comes out the drainage holes at the bottom of the pot and discard the excess water. Fertilizer isn't necessary during the first blooming season.

Keep Your Poinsettia Alive

In early spring, when the bracts (the colored leaf parts that resemble flower petals) begin to fade, prune the plant back to about 8 inches high. Remove any remaining bracts, but leave 3 to 4 green leaves per stem. Keep the plant by a sunny window, water when the soil feels dry and feed with a dilute, balanced organic fertilizer every few weeks through fall. By the end of May you should see plenty of new green growth.

Around June 1, transplant your poinsettia to a pot that is 2 to 4 inches larger in diameter. Add peat moss or leaf mold to the potting soil. Or, if the nights where you live stay consistently above 50 degrees F, plant it in a well-drained, protected site such as along a south garden wall outside. Be sure to water it thoroughly after transplanting. Prune back the tips of each shoot to 2 to 3 leaves. If you took your plant out to the garden, move it back indoors and pot it up again around the beginning of September. Set it in a location where it will receive at least 6 hours of bright light each day.

In late September, begin stimulating the natural conditions that trigger flowering, which are short days and long nights. Give the plants total darkness for 14 continuous hours each night for 8 to 10 weeks. Either move the plants into a dark room or closet or cover them with a box for those 14 hour stretches. Nighttime temperatures should range between 60 and 70 degrees F. (Temperatures much higher or lower than that may delay blooming.)

During the day, move the plants back to where they'll receive 6 to 8 hours of bright sunlight and temperatures of 70 to 75 degrees F. Continue covering the plants at night until the new bracts and the yellow buds in the center are fully colored.



CHRISTMAS CACTUS

The Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera X buckleyi*) is not to be confused with the Thanksgiving (*Schlumbergera truncata*) and Easter (*Rhipsalidopsis gaertneri*) cactuses, which are very similar but bloom at —surprise!—different times of the year.

The key to getting your Christmas Cactus to bloom is "photoperiod", which refers to how many hours of light and darkness your cactus gets. To bring your cactus into bloom, you manipulate the photoperiod to match its native conditions. That is, you create false days and night. Keep the plant in darkness for 14 hours each day (or really, night) and at about 60 degrees F. During the "day", give the cactus 10 hours of indirect bright light with the temperature at about 65 degrees F. Stick to this schedule and after about 25 days of this routine, flower buds will form. Then you can put the cactus on display—once the buds form they will open no matter what the photoperiod.

In the December Garden

- When frost is predicted, protect frost sensitive and tender plants with cloth or burlap or rowcovers. Suspend the cloth or burlap over the plant without letting it hang on the leaves. Do not tie the cloth closed around the bottom of the plant. As the heat radiates from the soil surface it helps to prevent frost damage. Remove or open coverings in the mornings.
- Pre-emergent herbicides may be applied to help control the emergence of winter annual weeds. Be sure to always read and follow label directions.
- Add compost and manure to garden areas as they become open. The addition of organic material not only provides a source of nutrients but also improves soil tilth and water-holding capacity.
- Start to plant bare-rooted trees, roses, grapes, and cane berries later in the month.
- Plant spring flowering bulbs early in the month such as iris, tulips, daffodil, crocus, and hyacinth.
- Irrigation of winter dormant trees and plants is critical to maintaining healthy plants. This water may be supplied through winter rains. If winter precipitation is less than normal, as it has been in recent years, this water will need to be supplied through irrigation. A good irrigation once per month should be sufficient.
- Save heavy pruning until plants are fully dormant. Prune now only to remove dead or diseased limbs. Remove all old fruit (mummies) from trees and all debris from the ground below. Sprinkle granular insecticide to reduce existing insects. This will significantly reduce the codling moth problem next year.
- Direct seed alyssum, sweet peas, and spring wild flowers in the garden.
- Set out perennials and cool season annuals, such as calendula, chrysanthemums, dianthus, daisies, larkspur, pansies, snapdragons, stocks, and violas.
- If you buy spring flowering bulbs such as iris, tulip, daffodils, crocus, and hyacinth, plant immediately.

Don't forget to feed the birds!



How to Turn Fallen Leaves Into Compost

If you have several trees that are shedding leaves, you may want to consider building a compost pile and decomposing the leaves into organic matter which is excellent for incorporating into desert soils. A fairly simple compost pile can be made by using wire fencing. Tie it together in a cylinder to contain the leaves and other compost material. Other residues which make good compost are grass clippings, kitchen scraps like citrus peels, vegetables, potatoe peels, and hedge clippings. If you are serious about composting, you can purchase a small grinder which will chop branches, cornstalks, and leaves into small fragments which will break down faster. To keep from causing an odor, the compost pile needs to have air and be turned once a week with moisture added as needed. A few handfuls of complete commercial fertilizer added to each load of raw materials will produce more rapid decomposing. Material may be decomposed and ready to use in six weeks to six months depending on temperature, moisture and size of material.

Planting Bare Root Roses

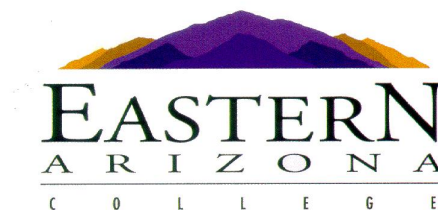
In Southern Arizona, the best time to plant roses is the last half of December through February. Bare root roses should be planted four to five weeks before the buds start to grow. In preparing planting holes for rose bushes, dig the hole 15 to 18 inches deep and the same in diameter. After the hole is dug, push the shovel full length into the bottom of the hole to make sure there is no hard pan and the soil will drain. Back fill the hole mixing organic material until the hole is six to eight inches deep. Make a slight mound of soil in the center of the hole and place the crown of the root system on the mound and spread the roots down the sloping sides in their natural growing position. The crown should be about two to three inches above the desired height to allow for settling. Cover with soil and water immediately after planting. You should plant roses as soon as possible after getting them from the nursery or keep the roots moist. Select good quality plants and if any roots are broken or injured, they should be cut off before planting. Roses should be spaced two to three feet apart. If the tops of the roses are too long, prune back to 12 inches.

HAPPY HOLLIDAYS!

Gardening and Landscaping Class



The University of Arizona
&
Eastern Arizona College
are offering
GARDENING
AND
LANDSCAPING
Spring 2006



Register for this Course Now!

Course: #1756 AGR 230 Tuesday 6 – 8:50 p.m. SC9 R. Norton
January 17 to May 12 on Tuesday Evenings at 6:00 p.m. in Room 9 on the South Campus of
Eastern Arizona College

Topics to be covered include pruning, diagnosing plant problems, fruit tree cultivation, vegetable gardening, lawn care, plant propagation, greenhouse production and design, and landscape design along with many other topics. Come and join us for a fun, interesting, and informative time.

Instructor: Randall Norton, Ph.D., Resident Director, Safford Agricultural Center, The University of Arizona, Graham County Cooperative Extension. Guest speakers on specific topics will also be included.

If you would like more information on the course, you may call 428-2432.

In order to enroll, go to EAC and sign up for Gardening and Landscaping, Course #1756, and we'll see you on Tuesday, January 17, at 6:00 p.m. The course book will be available for purchase during the first class meeting. For more information on registration, please call 428-8270 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Detach if mailing

NOTICE!

If you wish to continue to receive this newsletter, you must respond to the Cooperative Extension Office by January 15, 2006. You may do this in several ways:

928-428-2611 (Office Telephone)

928-428-7023 (Office Fax)

dorinec@ag.arizona.edu (E-Mail)

or mailing this form to:

Graham County Cooperative Extension

P. O. Box 127

Solomon, AZ 85551

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We prefer e-mail address as it will save dollars which can be used to continue this newsletter.

2ND GILA VALLEY GARDENING AND LANDSCAPING CONFERENCE



SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2006

8:00 A.M. TO 2:00 P.M.

Activities Center, Eastern Arizona College

Cost: \$25 Per Person

Includes Refreshments & Lunch

Workshops (Direct Marketing, Container Gardening, Pruning and Grafting, Insects, and Water Gardening presented by specialists from the University of Arizona County Extension agents and local gardening authorities. A question and answer session will also be held.

Information flyers with complete registration and program details will be mailed in January and be available at local gardening centers. For further information, contact the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Office at 428-2611.

Sponsored by: University of Arizona Graham County Cooperative Extension, Graham County Master Gardeners and Eastern Arizona College.

The Graham County Gardening Newsletter is Back in Distribution!!!

We plan to publish monthly. In some cases, you will find information published in previous letters as the interest in the information continues and as we have new readers. However, as in the past, we will continue to print new articles and provide information on activities of interest to you.

Persons with a disability may request accommodation, such as a sign language interpreter, by contacting U of A Graham County Cooperative Extension at 928-428-2611. Requests should be made as early as possible to allow time to arrange the accommodation.

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