PRUNING DEMONSTRATION FOR DECIDUOUS FRUIT TREES

We invite you to come to our annual fruit tree pruning demonstrations, this year held Wednesday, December 19, and Thursday, Dec. 20, at the orchard adjacent to the UCCE office, 1031 S. Mt. Vernon Ave., Bakersfield. The demonstration will begin at 12:00 noon each day, led by Mario Viveros of the University of California Cooperative Extension. Trees include apple, apricot, cherry, and almond, and Mario will also show how to prune grapevines.

The beneficial climate of Kern County allows residential planting of many deciduous fruit tree species. Unlike shade trees, deciduous fruit trees should be pruned every year before bud swell for optimum growth and yield. Pruning need not be complicated, but fruit trees are less forgiving than most shade tree species, and if pruned incorrectly the yield of fruit will be reduced or eliminated, and the life of the tree will be shortened. Pruning diagrams or photographs in books or on the Internet may be helpful, but seeing pruning in three dimensions and being able to ask questions are advantages for those who attend one of the demonstrations.

To reach the UCCE office and orchard, take Highway 58 and exit at Mt. Vernon, then proceed south for about 3/4 mile. Publications on pruning, fertilizer for fruit trees, and fruit tree varieties for the valley portion of Kern County will be available. There is no charge for attendance, nor is pre-registration required.

SPRING 2013 HORTICULTURE TOUR

In 2012, our group visited gardens in France and the Netherlands. This coming spring, 2013, we offer an opportunity to visit gardens of China. This 16-day custom tour includes meals, and will be accompanied by Chinese guides who speak English. The start date is April 15, 2013. The recent change in Chinese leadership and the economic situation there and in the U.S. suggest this to be an opportune time to visit China. If you would like to know more, please send me an email (or call, 661 868-6220) and I will send you additional information.
**October, 2013, Return to Chernobyl, Ukraine**

This past September I organized a group visit to Chernobyl, site of a nuclear accident in 1986. The two days in the Chernobyl area and the accompanying days in Kiev were fascinating, enough so that I plan to return for one more visit. If you would like to join me, please send me a note (or call) and I'll send you additional information. Chernobyl is a story of response to adversity and ecosystem recovery. The area is safe to visit and our group felt quite comfortable in Ukraine.

**For Maintenance Gardeners and Those Who Employ Them**

The Kern County Ag Commissioner’s office reminds us that maintenance gardeners who apply pesticides (includes herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, etc.,) as a part of their business are required under Section 11704 of the California Food and Agricultural Code to have a Maintenance Gardener Pest Control Business License.

To qualify for this business license, gardeners must first obtain a Qualified Applicator Certificate (QAC) (also known as a silver card). This certificate is issued by the State of California after the applicant passes a test covering laws and regulations, and the landscape maintenance pest control category. Also, each person who works in a given county under this business license is required to register with the county agricultural commissioner before performing pest control work. Gardeners are also required to report monthly the pesticide products used. It is not necessary that each member of a crew applying a pesticide hold the QAC, but the supervisor must. We can ask to see the certificate if hiring a maintenance gardener.

It is a violation of the law to apply pesticides or perform any kind of pest control for hire as a gardener, landscape maintenance business or any interiorscape business without a Maintenance Gardener Pest Control Business license. Any person who violates this law is subject to a civil penalty of up to $1,000 per violation.

The Commissioner’s office has heard stories of gardeners asking the homeowner to purchase pesticides so a gardener can apply them, apparently in an attempt to fly under the radar. However, it is the application of pesticides that is the intent of the law, so no matter who purchases the materials, the gardener who applies pesticides still needs to have a QAC.

For further information in Kern County, one may contact the Commissioner’s office at 1001 S. Mt. Vernon Avenue, Bakersfield, CA 93307-2851, 661-868-6300.

**Christmas Tree Farming in Kern County**

Occasionally the Farm Advisor’s office receives an inquiry from someone who owns a few acres in Kern County, whether in the Valley, mountains, or desert, and is thinking of starting a Christmas tree farm. Perhaps the idea is appealing due to nostalgia, or because a few acres isn’t much land for most crops. Perhaps Christmas trees seem like a nice retirement project.

I caution against beginning such an enterprise for several reasons. First, our county history says that few such farming operations succeed, even if well capitalized and run by people who know how to grow the trees. The number of Christmas tree growers is now about 5% of the number we had 20 years ago. Also, more than 50% of the Christmas tree market is now occupied by artificial trees, so overall demand has been affected by availability and improvements in appearance of artificial trees.

Trees grown in Kern have to compete with trees from the Northwest U.S., where irrigation is probably not necessary and so production costs are lower, maybe much lower than in Kern. Local growers have recognized that competition, had have moved to a
choose-and-cut model, but then it’s a matter of attracting buyers and creating enough ambience so buyers will spend the time and gas money to reach the field.

Christmas trees are an unusual commodity in that they rise in value up to Dec. 24 of each year, but on Dec. 26 unsold cut trees are worth nothing except perhaps as biomass. Choose-and-cut trees unsold in the field can be held over to the next year, but eventually enter a size range where they’re not likely to sell.

In sum, although growing Christmas trees may sound promising, the economic and horticultural realities in Kern County are weighed against such a venture.

**OLEANDER SCORCH**

Oleander samples brought to the Cooperative Extension office in Bakersfield in November showed symptoms of oleander scorch. Although winter is not the time this disease is most obvious, we want to note that oleander scorch has been confirmed in Kern County. Thanks to the work of Joe Nunez, plant pathologist with UC Cooperative Extension, and his colleagues, oleander scorch was positively identified in plant samples taken from oleanders at Bakersfield College in summer, 2011. Polymerase chain reaction, a technique for amplifying DNA, and bacterial culture both confirmed the presence of the causal bacterium, *Xylella fastidiosa*, in those oleanders.

There are several plant diseases that can interfere with water uptake and movement within plants resulting in symptoms resembling those caused by drought, including wilt diseases and scorch diseases. Of greatest economic importance in Kern County is Pierce’s disease of grapevines, also caused by the bacterium *Xylella fastidiosa*, but a different strain than the *Xylella* causing oleander scorch. The disease is spread by glassywinged sharpshooter insects. Once injected into grapevines by feeding, bacteria multiply and plug xylem tissue, causing inability of the vine to move water to leaves, resulting first in leaf scorch and ultimately in collapse of the vine. There is no remedy once the bacteria are inside the vine; prevention of transmission by controlling sharpshooter populations is the management strategy currently employed.

In the early 1990’s drought-stress and dieback symptoms were noticed on oleanders in the Palm Springs and Riverside areas. These symptoms were unusual since oleander is so well adapted to dry conditions because of its leaf structure, and we see the use of its drought tolerance in the hundreds of oleanders in many freeway medians where irrigation is infrequent. Subsequent investigation in Southern California revealed the presence of *Xylella fastidiosa* in the affected oleanders, although not the same strain that affects grapevines. Therefore, infected oleanders cannot result in transmission to nearby grapevines or vice versa.

The number of sharpshooter insects would be expected to affect the rate of transmission to oleanders around the county. Unfortunately, glassywinged sharpshooters are now frequently found throughout the Bakersfield area. If dieback of oleander is observed, pruning out affected branches may retard the spread of the bacteria within the plant.

There are other causes for dieback of oleanders, such as mineral toxicities and long-term lack of water. In colder-winter areas, like China Lake, oleander dieback is seen after winter. However, oleander has been one of the most persistent and durable plants in Kern County. Time will tell with regard to the disease impact of oleander scorch in the Bakersfield area.

There are UC IPM Pest Notes on both oleander scorch and the glassywinged sharpshooter, available at [http://ucipm.ucdavis.edu/PDF/PESTNOTES/index.html](http://ucipm.ucdavis.edu/PDF/PESTNOTES/index.html).
Disclaimer: Discussion of research findings necessitates using trade names. This does not constitute product endorsement, nor does it suggest products not listed would not be suitable for use. Some research results included involve use of chemicals which are currently registered for use, or may involve use which would be considered out of label. These results are reported but are not a recommendation from the University of California for use. Consult the label and use it as the basis of all recommendations.

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