

Meetings and Announcements

December Pruning Demonstrations

We invite you to come to our annual fruit tree pruning demonstrations, this year held Tuesday, December 13, and Wednesday, Dec. 14, 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 Mohammad Yaghmour of University of California Cooperative Extension. Trees include apple, apricot, cherry, and almond, and Mohammad 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 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.

35th Annual Landscape Management Seminar

The 35th Annual Landscape Management Seminar is scheduled for February 1, 2017, at Hodels. Visiting speakers include Jim Downer of UC Cooperative Extension, Ventura, who will speak about plant diseases. We'll have a noon demonstration, updates on laws and regulations, and an update on current pest problems. Abate-a-Weed is cooperating as a sponsor for this meeting and is handling registration. We expect 8 hours of PCA credit.

Horticulture V Class

I plan to offer Horticulture V in the spring of 2017 beginning February, probably Feb. 9 or Feb. 16, so Thursdays, and at our usual start time of 5:30 pm. I think it is now possible to mark your calendar. If there are specific topics of interest to you, please let me know. The class should be fun and interesting, since horticulture is fun and interesting

2017 Horticultural Tour: Iceland

Please consider joining our group for a visit to the spectacular geology and horticulture of Iceland, July 15-22, 2017. Please contact me if questions, jfkarlik@ucdavis.edu or 661 868-6220. The details for this visit are found in a .pdf that I can send you by email, or please find at http://travelgallery.com/images/Hort_Itinerary_2017_ver_2.pdf

Pruning of Outdoor Roses

I pruned my home roses in September and have enjoyed a strong fall bloom. In December/early January, annual winter pruning will be needed for hybrid teas and grandifloras.

Rose pruning in home gardens and landscapes can be a simple matter requiring relatively little time. As for other woody plants, pruning is used for roses to invigorate the plant and direct its growth, but the amount of pruning depends on rose type and purpose in the landscape.

Broadly speaking, most roses grown outdoors can be divided into two groups. The hybrid teas and grandifloras are grown for cut flowers, for example, the classic varieties 'Peace' and 'Oklahoma.' The shrub- or landscape-type roses are grown as floriferous shrubs, for example, the varieties 'Pink Simplicity,' 'Knock Out,' and 'Flutterbye.'

For hybrid tea and similar roses, we remove dead, diseased and damaged wood as well as older canes showing poor vigor. Canes severely affected by scale insects can also be removed. The rose plant can be thinned, removing central canes to favor 3-5 canes growing toward the outside. Although a standard recommendation is to make cuts at a 45° angle just above an outward-facing bud, it is not necessary for plant health to be so precise, since roses have many dormant buds and can form new buds readily. For hybrid teas and grandifloras, about 10-15 minutes per plant should be enough time for pruning. In other words, don't worry too much about exactly how and where cuts are made. An exception to that statement would be pruning for show roses and, of course, we are not talking about greenhouse flower production where pruning is specific per variety. The function of the rose plant in the landscape should influence the amount of pruning. Roses used for screens or accent plantings can be lightly pruned so as to retain their size. Pruning a rose to short canes does result in longer flower stems, if that is important to you.

Shrub- or landscape-type roses should be treated as floriferous shrubs, and should not be pruned back to a few short canes as hybrid teas can be. Rather, older canes can be removed, and (gasp) a hedge trimmer can be used for speed to shorten long canes and make the plant a bit smaller in size. Use of a hedge trimmer, however, does not imply that plants should be formed into little globes or boxes, diminishing their aesthetic value and defeating their purpose in the landscape. Landscape roses are typically (and should be) only lightly pruned, since they function as colorful shrubs, so upright varieties can be left to 5-8 feet.

A recent peer-reviewed study conducted by Dr. Jim Downer of the University of California Cooperative Extension showed that it is variety rather than pruning that has the most influence on flower number and growth of landscape-type outdoor roses (Downer et al., 2015, *Acta Horticulturae* 1064: 253-258). There were few differences in plant quality between intermediate pruning treatments (36 or 18 inches height). Severe pruning (6 inches) resulted in significantly fewer flowers in most varieties during the four-year study period. Plants pruned lightly had the greatest number of flowers. Variety selection had the most influence on plant characteristics over four years.

The University of California has three free publications that describe the care of outdoor roses, including insect and disease management. These can be read and downloaded from the UCIPM website, www.ipm.ucdavis.edu. Also, the University has a booklet, Healthy Roses, available via its publications catalog at <http://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu>.

Toxicity of Landscape and Garden Plants

Plants of many species can be found in landscapes and gardens. Although most are quite safe, some plants or plant parts may be sources of chemical compounds which affect the health of humans. Toxicity of a particular plant will depend on several factors including:

- the plant species
- the concentration of a potential toxicant
- the route of exposure (eating, skin contact)
- the dose received
- the identity and mode of action of the toxicant
- the sensitivity of the human to the toxicant
- the size of the person (child, adult)

The concentration of plant toxins can vary among different parts of the plant. Some plants concentrate toxic compounds in the fruits but not the leaves. In other plants, unripened fruit may be toxic but not ripened fruit. Other plants, such as oleander, have the toxicant in all plant parts.

Children should be taught not to eat backyard plants or plants found in nature, and it's a good idea to be able to identify all the plants in your yard. Many of the ornamentals used in landscapes are considered to be safe, especially members of the rose family, such as pyracantha, crabapple, and hawthorn.

The three plants most noteworthy in Kern County in terms of potential human toxicity are oleander, castor bean, and poison oak. Oleander is extraordinary in its tolerance of heat and drought, hence its use in freeway medians. Oleander, though, contains a potent toxin affecting the heart, but must be eaten to cause harm. Transfer of the toxicant to food can occur if oleander wood is used to skewer hot dogs, and oleander should never be used for that purpose. However, oleander leaves and wood may be safely composted and the toxicant will degrade, and will not be taken up into other plants via roots.

Castor bean seeds contain the extremely potent toxin ricin, and the seeds resemble edible beans. The seeds can be attractive to children and so castor bean seeds especially should be kept away from them. Castor bean plants are not frequently found in home landscapes, and these days I don't see them often in non-crop areas such as railroad right-of-ways.

Poison oak is common in the Kern Canyon and mountain areas, and touching the leaves or stems can result in a painful dermatitis. People vary in sensitivity to the toxicant, an oil named urushiol. Pets or tools can retain small amounts of urushiol after contact with poison oak, amounts enough to cause dermatitis in sensitive individuals, for example if a dog is petted. Poison oak leaves turn a bright scarlet in autumn, but even without leaves the plant stems are sources of the toxin, so contact should be avoided.

For more information about these plants and many others, please see the excellent chapter on poisonous plants available in the UC Master Gardener Handbook, second edition. Recently, that chapter has been made available as a stand-alone publication available free for downloading. It is publication no. 8560 available at the UC ANR publications website, <http://anrcatalog.ucanr.edu/pdf/8560.pdf>

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