

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 16. The class will run Thursdays, beginning at our usual time of 5:30 pm. If there are specific topics of interest to you, please let me know, since the formation of the syllabus is now well underway. The class should be fun and interesting, since horticulture is fun and interesting. If you plan to attend, please let us know via email to cekern@ucanr.edu or 661 868-6200. If you would like to see the syllabus, please contact me in later December.

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](http://travelgallery.com/images/Hort%20Itinerary%202017%20ver%202.pdf)

Winter Pruning of Outdoor Roses

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. Rose grown for cut flowers include hybrid teas and grandifloras, 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, removing perhaps 1/3 of the height. Pruning a rose to shorter 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>.

Wood Ashes as a Garden Fertilizer

Wood ashes from fireplaces or stoves may accumulate in winter. There are several potential benefits of adding wood ashes to soil, and first among those is as a source of potassium, since wood ashes contain about 5 to 7 percent potassium. Potassium, or potash, is necessary for the healthy growth of fruits and vegetables. After nitrogen, it is the nutrient used in greatest quantity in plants. Ashes from hardwoods contain more potassium than those from soft woods. Wood ashes also contain about 1½ percent phosphorus, also a necessary nutrient. To preserve nutrient content, ashes should not be stored where rain will leach out nutrients. Ashes may be spread at a rate of 5 to 10 pounds per 100 square feet of soil followed by incorporation. The minerals contained dissolve easily, so ashes should not be used close to seedlings to prevent fertilizer burn.

However, there are several potential disadvantages of using wood ashes as a fertilizer. Many Kern County soils are already high in potassium, and further additions may not be beneficial. Unlike many soil amendments and fertilizers, ashes are strongly alkaline in reaction. Soils in Kern tend to be too alkaline already, and wood ashes further increase pH. However, for larger gardens and landscapes, mixing small amounts of wood ashes with soil should not be harmful, and is a way of returning plant nutrients to soil.

Dormant Treatment for Home Fruit Trees and other Plants

Many Kern County residents who have fruit trees decide to apply a dormant treatment during the winter months. Dormant sprays can aid in controlling certain insects and diseases. Some common spray materials, such as horticulture oil and lime-sulfur, are classified as organic. While a dormant spray will not harm a fruit tree if applied properly, it is not necessary in many situations. Before applying, we should ask ourselves whether we are just following habit or our neighbor's practices.

Insect control usually comes to mind first, and scale insects are particularly susceptible to control with dormant oil. Application of horticultural oil can be used to reduce the overwintering population of some other tree pests, but oil is not a complete management program. The oil acts to cover insects, interfering with respiration. Addition of a small amount (1-1/2 – 2% by volume) of an insecticide will improve the effectiveness of the spray. Horticultural oil may be applied to most deciduous fruit species from December 1 to February 1. Plums and walnuts should be treated, if needed, with a delayed-dormant treatment, applied February 1 to 15. For deciduous fruits such as peaches, the insects controlled include San Jose scale, brown apricot scale, soft scale, European red mite (not common in Kern County), and peach twig borer. For apples, some aphid control is also possible. For home citrus, a dormant spray may be used to reduce the scale population. Oil may spot the rind, but the damage is only cosmetic and does not affect internal quality. Note that many insects, such as green fruit beetle, codling moth, and most mites, are not controlled by a dormant spray. Flathead and shothole borers are also not controlled with dormant or any other spray.

Disease control is not usually necessary in home orchards on the valley floor in Kern County because our dry climate does not favor development of fungus diseases. Additional winter rainfall, more likely further north or in foothill areas, does favor disease development. However, in the Bakersfield area, the diseases peach leaf curl and shothole (also called shoot blight) may develop in susceptible varieties of peaches and nectarines, and can be prevented by application of suitable fungicides ahead of the disease. Treatment during a disease outbreak is usually not effective because most fungicides act as

protectants rather than eradicants. Unfortunately, a single spray will not control both diseases unless applied in late fall or early winter. Peach leaf curl can be controlled with Bordeaux mixture or a fixed copper fungicide, such as COCS or copper hydroxide, applied in January. Bordeaux mixture is difficult to apply and some of the liquid copper fungicides are not very effective. If a fixed copper is not available, a lime-sulfur (calcium polysulfide) fungicide can be used. If shothole is a problem, a fungicide should be applied earlier in mid-November to mid-December, but lime-sulfur does not control shothole.

Fireblight, a bacterial disease of apple, crabapple, pear, Asian pear and quince, is not controlled by a dormant treatment.

Be sure to read and carefully follow label directions of any plant protection chemical.

John Karlik
Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science

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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