

Meetings and Announcements

December Pruning Demonstrations

We invite you to come to our annual fruit tree pruning demonstrations, this year held Tuesday, December 12, and Wednesday, Dec. 13, 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.

We will also be offering our publication on pruning of deciduous fruit and nut trees, as well as publications on fruit varieties and fertilizer for fruit trees.

36th Annual Landscape Management Seminar

The 36th Annual Landscape Management Seminar is scheduled for February 7, 2018, at Hodels. Visiting speakers include Maggie Reiter of UC Cooperative Extension, Fresno, who will speak about turf diseases. We'll have a noon demonstration, updates on laws and regulations, and updates on vertebrate pest problems. Abate-a-Weed is cooperating as a sponsor for this meeting and is handling registration. We expect 8 hours of PCA credit.

Spring Horticulture Class--Ridgecrest

A spring horticulture class is to be offered in Ridgecrest with cooperation of the Indian Wells Valley Water District (IWWVD) and the East Kern Resource Conservation District. The focus will be plants and water conservation. The class will begin February 13, 2018, and be held at the IWWVD office.

Spring Horticulture Class--Tehachapi

I am working toward offering a spring horticulture class in Tehachapi. If you live in that area and have an interest in such a class, please contact me.

Winter Irrigation for Home Landscapes, Gardens, and Orchards

The need for water in a landscape varies from summer to winter by about a factor of 10. The December-January period sees the lowest demand from plants at about one or two hundredths of an inch per day, and so irrigation clocks can be adjusted so the system runs perhaps once per week. In many years, it has been possible to shut off irrigation during winter, since plant needs are taken care of by rain. But not this year. If we don't get rain, or much rain, it will be advisable to run irrigation weekly or so through December and into January, both for plants and to replenish the soil reservoir.

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.

Fire blight, a bacterial disease of apple, crabapple, pear, Asian pear and quince, is not controlled by a dormant treatment. However, it is possible to prune out damaged wood before spring, but if you do, be sure to disinfect cuttings tools with bleach between cuts so as not to move the disease around. See the Pest Note on fire blight at ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7414.html. Be sure to read and carefully follow label directions of any plant protection chemical.

More Meetings and Announcements

Return to Chernobyl, April, 2018

I am now moving toward finalizing who wants to join our group for a return visit to Chernobyl. Therefore, please let me know if you are interested.

Chernobyl, Ukraine, was the site of a nuclear accident 31 years ago. Since that time, the ecosystem in the affected area (the “Zone”) has recovered remarkably. Several people have said they would like to visit, but did not have previous opportunity. We have plans for a return visit April 15-20, 2018. We anticipate access to areas not previously visited, and there have been developments in the social and cultural aspects of the Zone as well. Please contact me if interested at jfkarlik@ucdavis.edu.

John Karlik

Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science

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