

## Meetings and Announcements

### **36<sup>th</sup> Annual Landscape Management Seminar—February 7**

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. There are eight hours of PCA credit available for this meeting, including two hours of laws.

### **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.

### **Horticulture Class—Tehachapi—Let's plan on autumn, 2018**

I do plan to offer a horticulture class in Tehachapi. In light of my schedule and circumstances that have developed, rather than this spring, I plan to offer a class in the fall, probably starting late August. Please feel free to check back with me in summer on the dates, time, and location. Of course, I'll also announce in the Greenscene.

## **Crabgrass and the Rule of the Superbowl**

Crabgrass is one of the most common weeds in turf in the Bakersfield area. Because it is an annual, it grows from seed each year. Therefore, its biology offers an opportunity to suppress it as it is becoming established, specifically through the use of a pre-emergent herbicide.

In the Bakersfield area, crabgrass seed begins to germinate around the first week of February. That is well ahead of the time bermudagrass and other warm season grasses emerge from dormancy, so crabgrass can have a month or more without competition from other plants. Because it reestablishes from seed, that process can be interrupted with herbicides that interfere with rooting of seeds, i.e., pre-emergents. There are several products on the market that can be used with bermudagrass or tall fescue (be sure to check the label!) that will suppress crabgrass but not injure the underlying turf. However, most of these herbicides have little post-emergent activity; that is, they are not effective against established plants. Therefore, they need to be applied before the plants become established. Timing is key. If applied too late, they will not be effective.

By some quirk of fate, the playing of the Superbowl and crabgrass germination occur about the same time in Bakersfield and the southern San Joaquin Valley. So, a handy way to remember when to apply a pre-emergent herbicide is to associate its application with the game. If one does that, the herbicide will not be applied too late.

## Deciduous Fruit Trees for the Home Orchard

The salubrious climate of the southern San Joaquin Valley allows many kinds of deciduous trees fruit to thrive. The typical winter fog is also beneficial for deciduous fruits because fog events increase the number of chilling hours. Mountain locations are also suitable for fruit species, such as apples, which require additional chilling and cooler summer temperatures to develop quality fruit. However, mountain sites may experience an increased risk of late spring frost, an event that can destroy the crop. Desert locations may be suitable for some fruit varieties, and good yields may be obtained in home orchards—again if late frost does not injure the crop.

When selecting fruit trees, be sure to obtain a variety suitable for your location. The widest selection is often found in early spring when bareroot trees become available. These allow the buyer to see the root system and also generally cost less than container stock. Nemaguard rootstock is preferred for stone fruits where nematodes may be a problem, which would be in most locations in Kern County. For apple trees, various rootstocks of the MM series give varying degrees of dwarfing. A list of fruit varieties suggested for home orchards located on the valley floor is available from the UC Cooperative Extension Office, 1031 S. Mt. Vernon, Bakersfield. Some fruit species are easier to grow than others, and in order of easiest to more difficult I rank them as follows:

- Apricot (vigorous, self-fruitful, few pest problems, what to do with all the apricots?)
- Plums (often partly self-fruitful and with few pest problems)
- Cherries (although cherries are sensitive to over-watering, and resulting root rot and it's sometimes difficult to keep birds from devouring the crop)
- Peaches
- Nectarines
- Apples (summers are too warm in Bakersfield for most varieties)
- Pears (but fireblight often kills young trees, so not reliable in Kern County)

Some varieties of each species are better adapted locally than others. Variety selection may also obviate some pest problems. For example, mid-season peaches mature during the annual green fruit beetle flight, whereas later- or earlier-maturing varieties avoid this insect. If cross pollination from another variety is necessary for fruit set, such as for sweet cherries, be sure to get a compatible pollinator, or use a two-in-one or three-in-one grafted tree. Labeling branches of grafted trees may prevent an inadvertent pruning cut which completely removes one of the varieties. It's also a good idea to keep a record of tree varieties.

When planting, choose a location that will receive plenty of sunlight and, if possible, will be protected from wind. Allow plenty of space for the mature trees. For full-sized trees, 20 to 24 feet from others is a typical spacing. Soil amendments or fertilizer in the planting hole are generally not necessary and may prove deleterious. After planting, it's best to settle the soil with water rather than tamping the soil. We recommend applying whitewash, or white latex paint diluted 1:1 with water, to the trunks of young trees to prevent sunburn.

There are three pruning phases in the life of a deciduous fruit tree. Most fruit and nut trees grown locally can be trained to an open center. (For trees in cold climates, a modified central leader is often preferred.) The first pruning occurs at planting, when the first cut should be made to foster development of a low vase-shaped structure. After a bareroot tree is planted, the trunk should be headed at 24-32 inches above the soil surface. This cut may be emotionally difficult to make, because it may seem as though \$15 of a \$20 tree has been removed. But when we purchase a deciduous fruit tree at the nursery, we are really paying for a well-developed root system and the grafted (scion) variety—the top structure is not important. (Note: The situation is very different for shade trees, where the top of the plant and how it has been pruned affect tree structure and development.) For deciduous fruit trees, this most-important cut serves to establish low origination points of structural branches, which will allow most pruning, harvesting, and pest management to be performed without a ladder during the life of the tree. Trees in agricultural fields need higher branching for equipment passage, but low branching greatly facilitates tree care at home.

The second phase of pruning serves to establish structure, and this phase begins the year following establishment. The low heading cut of the previous year will result in several branches growing outward at various directions and angles, and three or four strong, upwardly growing branches spaced at intervals around the trunk should be selected as scaffolds. Additional branches can be removed. Pruning the next few years emphasizes structural development, including a well-spaced system of scaffolds and laterals.

The third phase of pruning begins with the onset of maturity, which is 5 - 7 years for most fruit trees. At this stage, the tree should be pruned for fruit production, with consideration of the location of fruiting wood. Pruning at this stage serves to invigorate and direct growth of the tree, with a goal of keeping it forever young; that is, annually producing new fruiting wood. A detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this article, but principal determinants for pruning are the location and amount of fruiting wood. We hold annual pruning demonstrations in December to show how fruit trees should be pruned. We also have a publication, available at our office, which discusses pruning deciduous fruit trees.

## More Meetings and Announcements

### Return to Chernobyl, April, 2018—Last Announcement

I am now finalizing our group composition for a return visit to Chernobyl. Chernobyl, Ukraine, was the site of a nuclear accident almost 32 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](mailto:jfkarlik@ucdavis.edu).

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