

Arkansas County Cooperative Extension Service

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HORTICULTURE NEWS

September 22, 2020

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Our county agents and staff are continuing to serve the public by answering calls and accepting soil samples, etc., but we are having limited entry to our offices in an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19. Please use the contact information on this page to reach us!

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Fall Tree Care and Planting Tips

Planting trees in November while they are dormant allows them time to put down roots before having to contend with supplying nutrients and water for foliage.



- Fall is a great time in Arkansas to plant trees and shrubs.
- Proper plant selection is critical.
- Be sure to have your soil tested for nutrient and pH levels before planting.
- It is generally not necessary to fertilize established trees and shrubs unless there is a deficiency or if stem growth and leaf color are not normal.
- Newly planted trees and shrubs will need added moisture if we do not get regular rainfall.
- In general, the ideal time to prune ornamental trees is just before rapid growth in the spring. The time of year to prune ornamental shrubs depends on when they flower.
- Pruning is an invigorating process that puts the tree in “growth mode,” “de-hardening” the plant and making it more susceptible to winter injury.

Mulching Your Tree



- The depth of an organic mulch should not exceed 3 inches after settling as shown in photo.
- Somehow, the concept of mulching has gotten out of hand. Over the past 30 years there has been a shift from no mulch to “volcano” mulching. Mulching offers many advantages including reducing weeds, protecting the trunk from string trimmer damage, conserving soil moisture and adding organic matter to the soil. Research has shown a dramatic increase in tree growth when a small area above the root ball is maintained free of vegetation.

Placement of Mulch

- The depth of an organic mulch should not exceed 3 inches after settling. Never pile mulch against the trunk. Mulch resting on the trunk and applying too thick a layer may result in increased stem and root diseases, may harbor rodents that feed on the trunk and may reduce the oxygen required by roots.

Type of Mulch

- A wide variety of products are available for use as landscape mulch. Mulch can be broadly categorized as either organic or inorganic. Common inorganic mulch materials include crushed stone, recycled tire chips and gravel. Organic materials include pine needles, softwood or hardwood tree bark, colored wood chips, composted yard waste, and cottonseed hulls.

Raised Bed Gardening

A raised bed garden can mean many things! In general, though, it's when a planting bed sits on top of your existing soil. It can be anywhere from just a few inches tall to waist-high (or higher), and can be made of many different materials. Usually, there is room left around the outside of each bed so you can walk around it (not in it). If you have not tried raised bed gardening, there are several reasons to give it a try.



Some of the benefits of raised bed gardening are:

- Less weeds
- Better drainage in areas with clay soils
- Easier to control soil quality
- More growing space
- No soil compaction from human feet
- Warmer soil earlier in the season
- Warmer soil for a *longer* season
- Soil that has basically a neutral pH unless you add something to change it (because you're filling it)
- Less soil erosion (especially, if the bed is framed)
- Taller raised beds are easier on your back with less bending over
- They help keep out critters
- They can look nicer
- Raised beds can be constructed in ideal sunshine and can be placed anywhere
- You can garden in limited spaces
- Rotation is easy to practice
- Beds can be made from many materials



Treating Crepe Myrtle Bark Scale

Based on limited experience with this pest, it does not appear that CMBS will be easy to control, though soil-applied neonicotinoids do provide significant suppression. Our current best suggestions for control of this insect include:

- For heavily infested plants, wash the trunk and reachable limbs with a soft brush and mild solution of dishwashing soap. This will remove many of the female scales and egg masses and make insecticide control more effective. Also, washing will remove much of the black mold that builds up on the bark on infested trees.
- Horticultural oil has not yet been shown to be effective against this insect; however, a winter application of dormant oil to the bark and crotches of the plants where scales shelter may be beneficial. Be sure to use sufficient volume to allow for penetration behind loose bark and into cracks and crevices. Winter is an especially good time to treat for scales because a higher (winter) application rate can be used without damaging the plant. Thorough coverage of the tree is especially important when treating with oil.
- Application of systemic insecticides as a drench applied to the root zone has shown the most promise in tests to date. Imidacloprid (Merit® or Bayer Advanced™ Garden Tree and Shrub Insect Control), thiomethoxam (Meridian®) and dinotefuran (Greenlight Tree and Shrub Insect Control with Safari) have shown best control when applied between May and July. When drenching the soil with a systemic insecticide, allow several weeks for the product to be distributed throughout the plant. Additionally, acetamiprid and clothianidin, also neonicotinoids, have demonstrated good control.



What's Wrong With My Plant?



If you have a plant or tree that doesn't look quite right, our office will be glad to send a sample to the plant health clinic for diagnosis. Before our plant diagnosis team can accurately identify what is wrong with your plant, they need to have a quality sample to examine. The accuracy of the disease diagnosis is directly related to the type of plant sample submitted to our clinic. You can take two steps to help make an accurate diagnosis.

Guidelines for Collecting and Submitting Plant Samples:

1. Submit only freshly collected specimens. If possible, collect several specimens showing a progression or range of symptoms. Keep specimens refrigerated until they are brought in for examination. Bring samples into the Extension office during the first part of the week.
2. Where specific plant parts are affected (leaf spots, root rots, fruit rots, flower blights, stem cankers), submit the affected part in as many stages of the disease as you can distinguish. If practical, submit the whole plant. Enclose specimens in plastic bags, or in the case of ripe fruit in paper bags. **DO NOT ADD WATER OR WET PAPER TO THE BAG.** Additional moisture will speed decay.
3. For plants showing wilting, yellowing, stunting or general decline, collect the entire plant including the root system. Do not pull the plant out of the ground. Dig the plant carefully so as to disturb the root system as little as possible. Shake away excess soil. **DO NOT WASH SOIL FROM THE ROOT SYSTEM.** Enclose the root system in a plastic bag and seal it at the base of the plant stem to prevent soil spillage. Then enclose the entire plant in another plastic bag and seal. **DO NOT ADD ADDITIONAL MOISTURE.** - continued -

4. For leaf spots, submit leaves showing various stages of infection. If possible, bring in twigs or branches with leaves still attached. Enclose leaves in a plastic bag. Individual leaves may be placed between layers of DRY paper towels.
5. For lawn and turf diseases, submit a 3 to 4 inch diameter plug taken where the healthy and diseased areas meet so the sample will contain both diseased and healthy turf. Take the plug 2 to 3 inches deep and include roots and the adhering soil. Samples can be dug with a garden trowel or small spade. Enclose sample plugs in a plastic bag. **DO NOT ADD ADDITIONAL MOISTURE.**

SWEET POTATOES – a Nutritional Powerhouse

Alta Lockley, CEA-4-H/FCS

The sweet potato is a tuberous root vegetable that belongs to the same plant family as the morning-glory. Native to Central America, sweet potatoes have been cultivated in the southern United States since the 16th century.

Nutritional Value: Sweet potatoes are often referred to as a nutritional powerhouse because they are high in beta-carotene – an antioxidant that may reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers. They are a good source of vitamin B-6, vitamin C, potassium and dietary fiber.

Storage Tips:

- Sweet potato growers usually cure them – hold them at a high temperature and humidity for about 10 days before sending them to market. Curing helps preserve sweet potatoes and enhances their sweetness.
- Store in a dry, unrefrigerated bin. Storing at 44-60 degrees is best.
- **DO NOT REFRIGERATE.** Chilling this tropical vegetable will give it a hard core and an undesirable taste when cooked.
- Freshly dug or uncured potatoes are better boiled and used in dishes that include fruit or syrup.

Source: Enjoy Arkansas' Fresh Sweet Potatoes FCS727



SWEET POTATO OVEN FRIES

4 medium sweet potatoes

Nonstick vegetable oil spray

2 Tbsp. oil

Optional Seasonings:

Mix equal parts ground nutmeg and cinnamon

Mix 1/8 tsp. each paprika, garlic flakes, and salt with a pinch of cayenne pepper

Preheat oven to 475°F. Lightly spray a baking sheet with nonstick vegetable oil spray. Wash potatoes thoroughly and dry with a paper towel. Cut the potatoes into long strips, about ½ inch thick. Put oil in a plastic bag, Add potatoes and toss to evenly coat with oil. You may add any seasonings to the bag. Spread the strips in a single layer on the baking sheet and place in preheated oven. Bake at 475° for 40 minutes, turning once.

Serves 6. Serving size: 10 fries

Nutrition information per serving: Calories 130, Fat 5 g, Carbohydrate 21 g, Sodium 10 mg, Fiber 3.8 g

Source: Cooking with Extension

Master Gardeners Now Have Option of On-Line Training



The Master Gardener Program is one of the many educational programs offered through the UA Cooperative Extension Service. As you are aware, with the Covid-19 pandemic it has been a challenging year for all us as we have readjusted our programs to meet the needs of our clients. For those interested in becoming a Master Gardener we are currently offering an on-line training option. This training can be completed through a self-paced curriculum.

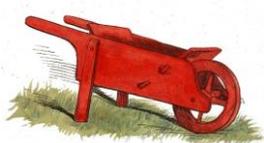
How much time is involved?

After completing your 40-hour horticulture training, you are required to volunteer 40 working hours and 20 learning hours back to your county program during your first year. In your subsequent years, you will provide only 20 working hours and 20 learning hours to remain actively certified.

The Master Gardener on-line training fee is \$75. Deadline for signup is October 1. The on-line course is self-paced and will be open until December 15.

Arkansas County currently has 35 active members who volunteered 1,170 hours in the county in 2019 while maintaining eight beautification projects, conducting their annual plant sale and luncheon, assisting with the county fair, and other programs. If you are interested in becoming a Master Gardener, contact the Arkansas County Extension Office at 870-946-3231 or 870-673-2346 for an application and additional information.

Are Cover Crops Right For Your Garden?



Planting cover crops in the fall is becoming more popular, even in small gardens.

Imagine this: While you and your garden rest over the wintertime, you have a garden helper who is working hard to improve your soil. That's the role of the cover crop!

Benefits of cover crops include:

- ✓ Stopping erosion; keeping soil from blowing or washing away. When you remove plants, you remove nature's way of protecting the landscape and its fertility.
- ✓ Increasing organic matter and nutrients
- ✓ Increasing activity of earthworms and beneficial microorganisms
- ✓ Decreasing compaction and improving water, root, and air penetration of soil
- ✓ Providing habitat and food (nectar, pollen) for beneficial insects and late-season pollinators
- ✓ Creating something to see during winter dormancy
- ✓ Some cover crops inhibit weed growth

Disadvantages of using cover crops include:

- Cost of seeding the crop
- Cost and timing of terminating the crop
- Increased risk of disease, pest, and insects

If you are interested in learning more about using cover crops in your garden or would like additional information on any topics discussed in this newsletter, contact the Arkansas County Extension Office at 870-946-3231 or 870-673-2346.