PRUNING

I have been receiving many calls on pruning this time of year. You still have some time to prune up to the end of the month on most trees and shrubs. What we need to remember is that, early spring blooming shrubbery should not be pruned until after the blooming period as their flower buds start to form for next year through the summer and fall, thus dormant pruning will cause you to have a shrub with no blooms.

All other plants will be ok, just try not to give them a haircut look and be sure to open up the canopy to allow air flow through the plant. A good rule of thumb is to never remove more than one third of the total limb mass at any one pruning session. More removal of canopy than that could very well put the tree under severe stress leading to disease and/or death.

With the latest news about the rise in Lead concentrations in drinking water I thought I would pass along some information from the National Groundwater Association.

LEAD: What To Know

Lead is a metal that occurs naturally in the environment. It is poisonous to humans and animals when consumed. Among other things, in the past lead has been used in household plumbing and well systems.

Lead can affect almost every organ and system in the body, and the main target for lead toxicity is the nervous system. High lead levels can severely damage the brain and kidneys in adults or children and be lethal. In pregnant women, high exposure levels may cause miscarriage.

Fortunately, the presence of lead in groundwater tends to be very small.
A greater concern is lead in galvanized steel pipes, certain brass used in plumbing fixtures or well components, and certain solder used to connect pipes and joints. While lead content allowed in plumbing and well components has been greatly reduced—most recently in 2014—it can still be a health risk for houses and/or well systems that pre-date federally mandated lead content reductions.

The federal Maximum Contaminant Level for lead in public drinking water systems is 15 parts per billion—a good guide for private well owners testing their drinking water.

Two factors that can affect how much lead leaches into the water are:

1. The length of time water is in contact with lead before being used
2. The corrosiveness of the water due to either high pH or low pH

Use a qualified water well system professional to determine the source of lead in your water. If the groundwater coming into the well is not the problem, the professional can check your well system for components that contain higher lead levels. A plumber may be able to identify lead sources in household plumbing.

If such components are the lead source, the homeowner has three basic options:

1. **Replace the problem components** with new ones that meet current federal requirements.
2. **Treat the water** that is being consumed. The National Sanitation Foundation recommends appropriate filters, reverse osmosis units, and distillers. Make sure the system is certified under NSF/ANSI standards for lead reduction from 0.150 mg/L to 0.010 mg/L or less.

Sometimes lead problems in drinking water are due to low pH. When pH levels drop below 7.0, water becomes acidic, which can cause lead to leach from plumbing fixtures. Acid neutralizing systems are generally used to correct this situation.

If you install a treatment system, always follow the manufacturer's maintenance instructions.

3. **Flush water that has been sitting in your water system for a long time** (such as overnight) to remove water into which lead has leached. Experiment with testing the water after flushing from different taps to determine the best length of time to flush.

### Starting Veggie Gardens

March and April starts folks thinking about starting their gardens. With the warmer temperatures this year many folks are starting to plant too early.

Remember in our plant zone we always look for our last frost date as **April 16**. So not only could we end up with a frost, warm season plants like tomatoes, peppers, okra, melons and beans need warmer soil temperatures to thrive. Planting in cool ground temps will only allow the plants to survive and not flourish. This condition will most likely stress your warm season plants making them more susceptible to disease.
Moles and Gophers

Few things in this world are more frustrating than spending valuable time and money on a landscape only to have it torn up by wildlife. Moles' underground habits aerate the soil and reduce grubs, but their digging is cause for homeowner complaints.

Contrary to popular belief, moles are not rodents. Moles are insectivores in the family Talpidae. This animal family survives by feeding on invertebrate prey. Moles spend most of their lives underground feeding on invertebrate animals living in the soil. A mole’s diet sharply reflects the diversity of the fauna found in its environment. The Eastern mole’s diet has been found to consist of at least 52 different foods, including scarabaeid beetle larvae, ants, centipedes and earthworms.

Moles live a solitary existence. They use their scent to mark territory and may fight other moles to assert dominance of an area. A mole may recolonize an abandoned tunnel system of another mole. In late winter, males will seek females to mate with, and a litter of four pups will be born and cared for by the mother. Gestation is short – about 30 to 40 days. Pups will spend 30 to 70 days in their mother’s territory before leaving the nest in search of their own range. For this reason, many new infestations occur in spring. A mole’s territory depends mostly on food availability, but age and gender also play a role. Biomass is the total amount of living matter in your soil. Irrigated and fertilized lawns usually have more biomass. More biomass means more earthworms and grubs, which are the mole’s food source.

Mole control can be challenging. Many folk remedies and a few scientifically based control measures have been employed through the years. Because of the mole’s complex nature, sometimes positive results have been attributed to a treatment which actually has little effect on moles. Their underground habits and response to habitat changes lead to misinterpretation of mole activity. For as long as Americans have had gardens, there have been mole control measures. Unfortunately, these seldom work. A few of the more popular ones are- Poison Baits (illegal in Arkansas), Castor Beans, Flooding, Chemical Repellents and Sonic Repellers- none of these work!

Grub control in lawns along with physical trapping are the only methods that will actually work. Many sources recommend using grub control as a means to control moles. Since moles eat approximately 62 percent of their body weight daily, this seems reasonable. However, while it is true that moles eat grubs, they also eat worms and other invertebrates; therefore, grub control alone will likely be ineffective. Trials in Sebastian County have not shown a significant reduction in worm populations due to grub killer application.

Trapping moles is the preferred method of removing moles. Good mole traps are effective and dispatch the mole quickly. Since moles use tunnels for movement and to gather food, they are compelled to keep tunnels open. This is the basis for mole trapping. Moles are caught by placing a trap, along with an obstruction, in a main tunnel.

Sincerely,

Mike McClintock
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