Something to Grow On

February 2008

Inquiring Minds Want to Know….

How to “start” seeds indoors?

Spring is just around the corner! Many of you like to get a jump on Mother Nature by starting your garden indoors in containers. Any type container that drains well will work; however, plastic flats with many sections are normally preferred. Begin by purchasing commercial potting soil and adding to the flats. I personally had rather buy my potting soil than mix it myself. One reason for this is that what we buy prepackaged has been sterilized. This is critical, because if the soil has not been sterilized you open the door for seedling diseases such as dampening off. Before planting your seed fill your pots/flats with water the day before you intend to plant.

Follow the directions on the pack concerning planting depth. As a general rule plant seed no closer together than an inch. I also recommend placing a tray under the pots and watering from the bottom up. Keep about ¼ to ½ inch or water in this tray at all times. This method works great because you don’t damage the young plants. Next place pots near a window preferably facing south. Now place a cool-white fluorescent plant light over the plants. Place the light about two inches above the plants. You may wonder why so close to the plant? By placing the light this close it keeps the plant from trying to grow toward the light. This will keep you from having “leggy” plants. You will probably want to give your plants 12-14 hours of light per day. Temperatures should be between 70-75°F with nighttime temperatures around 60°F. Thin seedlings when they are about an inch tall. Once plants have formed their first true leaf, fertilize them with a water soluble plant food that has been mixed with double the amount of water normally used. Water plants every 7-10 days. Before you transplant them to your garden you will want to prepare them for the harsher environment by a process called “hardening off”. This process consists of reducing temperature, light intensity as well as going longer periods of time in between waterings. One simple way of doing this is to place the plants outdoors everyday for about 2 week prior to planting in your garden. This will help to toughen plants up before they have to make it on their own!!
The questions arise when and how much fertilizer should be applied to fruit trees. A soil analysis is highly recommended for determining an accurate composition of the soil nutrients. If a soil analysis is not available, some general guidelines can be followed.

Fertilization should not begin for at least 3 months after planting to allow time for the soil encircling the plant to settle and to allow the plant to establish some roots in the surrounding soil. A complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10 is usually applied in the early spring just prior to the plant leafing out. The recommendations listed are general, in lieu of a soil analysis.

**Pecan**
- Apply February or early March
- For nonbearing trees apply 1 lb of 10-10-10 fertilizer per year of tree age (do not exceed 25 lbs per tree)
- For bearing trees apply 4 lbs of 10-10-10 per inch of trunk diameter
- Broadcast the fertilizer in a broad band around the drip line of the tree
- Pecans require adequate amounts of zinc so foliar applications of zinc sulfate may be needed after first growth

**Pear/Persimmon**
- ½ lb per plant per year of growth. Up to 10 lbs. Per plant. Apply in early March.

**Apple/Fig/Plum/Peach**
- 1st year – ½ lb per plant
- After 1st year- 1 lb per plant per year of growth up to a maximum of 10 lbs per plant
- Apply at bud swell (February – early March).

**Blackberry**
- 1st year – 4 ounces per plant
- After 1st year – 8 ounces per plant
- Apply at bud swell (March). Ammonium Nitrate (6 ounces/plant) applied in early July will increase plant vigor and fruit set.

**Grape/Muscadine**
- 1st year – ¼ lb per plant
- 2nd year – ½ lb per plant
- 3rd year – 1 lb per plant
- After 3rd year – 2 lbs per plant
- Apply complete fertilizer when vines start to leaf (March-April). Ammonium Nitrate (1/2 lb per plant) applied in mid June will increase vine vigor.

**Blueberry**
- 2 ounces per plant per year of age to a maximum of 8 ounces per plant per year.
- Use azalea or camellia fertilizer for best results
- Apply ½ the recommended amount in March and ½ in June.
- Fertilizer should be spread uniformly under the tree or bush form the drip line back to trunk.
- Avoid fertilization after June, as late season growth is more susceptible to winter damage.
What is that “Purple Flower”?

Everybody always wants to know what the little trumpet shaped flower is that comes up in their fescue lawns. The name of this pesky little weed is “Henbit”. We normally start seeing it bloom in late winter or early spring. However, this year due to the unusual weather I have seen some in lawns that are already starting to bloom. For best results lawn sprays can be used when weeds are small and preferably before flower blooms. On a normal year it would probably be around Valentines Day. There are several sprays on the market that will control “henbit”. I would make sure that what every formulation I purchased consisted of 2-4D, Dicamba, MCCP, and Carfentrazone. One formulation called Speed Zone has worked well in my trials. By using a product that has 2-4D, Dicamba, MCCP and Carfentrazone one can also control weeds other than Henbit. Good control can also be achieved on wild garlic, chickweed, white clover, and dandelions just to name a few.

Gardening Calendar

January-February

- Winter Pruning of Fruit Trees-Do apple and pecan first followed by cherry, peach, and plum.
- Fertilize fescue lawns with 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet in February (example: this would be the same as 10 lbs per 1000 square feet of a 10-10-10 fertilizer).
- Late January through mid-February is an excellent time for lawn weed herbicides. This can be done either with weed and feed fertilizers or by liquid spray applications.
- Muscadine vines should be pruned in late January-February
- Blueberries-remove diseased or damaged canes in late winter
- Blackberries-remove old canes anytime after harvest
- Excellent time to prune ornamentals such as Arborvitae, Boxwoods, Butterfly bushes, Cherry-Laurel, Crape Myrtles, Gardenias, Nandinas and Photinas

March

- Roses- prune roses just before dormancy is breaking as well as begin your rose spray program
- Ponds should be fertilized starting this month and continuing through October
- Plants of broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower should be set out in the garden in mid-March
- The following vegetables can be planted this month: beets, carrots, Chinese cabbage, lettuce, turnips, and kale.
- Spray your apple and pear trees with streptomycin for control of Fire blight.

Shannon L. Braswell
Extension Agent
Agriculture - Horticulture
Inside This Issue

- Inquiring Minds Want to Know...
- Fruit Tree Growing Guide
- The What and When of Fertilization
- Winter Pruning of Fruit Trees
- Things to Consider When Starting an Orchard
- What is that Purple Flower?
- Gardening Calendar
- Newsletter Evaluation

NC Cooperative Extension delivers reliable research based information to citizens to stimulate economic prosperity, build environmental stewardship and improve the quality of life by providing programs addressing local high-priority needs in the following areas:

- Enhancing agriculture, forest and food systems
- Conserving and improving the environment and natural resources
- Building quality communities
- Strengthening and sustaining families
- Developing responsible youth

Plants Available Include:

- √ Blueberries
- √ Blackberries
- √ Strawberries
- √ Muscadines
- √ Figs & Persimmons
- √ Pecan Trees
- √ Ornamental Shrubs
Winter Pruning—Fruit Trees

It’s that time of year again... Everyone always wants to know when is the best time to prune those fruit trees. Normally pruning should be done as late in the winter as possible, but while trees are still dormant. Apple trees and pecan trees are normally done first followed by cherry, peach, and plum. A good rule of thumb is to prune the latest blooming trees first and the earliest blooming last. Another factor to consider is the age of a tree within a particular fruit type. The oldest trees should be pruned first and younger trees are more prone to winter injury from early pruning.

Things to Consider when Starting an Orchard

Site Selection

- Will plant receive enough sun light?
- Will plant have enough room to expand without interfering with surroundings?
- Will mature plant block line of vision from window or driveway?
- Is soil suitable for the plant’s growing (pH, drainage)?
- Are varieties close enough for cross-pollination (within 200 feet of each other)? This may not be applicable to all species.
- Can area be expanded for future plantings?

How to Plant

- Keep the plant in the container, well watered, until the hole is dug.
- Dig hole twice as wide and 1 1/2 times as deep as the container. Fill bottom half of hole with loose soil (no fertilizer), so plant will not be planted to deep. Unless soil is poor, use soil removed from the hole to backfill. If soil, is poor, you should consider amending with potting media (50% soil/50% media)
- Remove plant from container carefully so as not to disturb root ball. Set plant in hole making certain plant is straight and centered. Do not set plant deeper than it was planted in container.
- Backfill hole, firming soil around plant roots as you fill. Mound a 2 inch high levee about 12 inches around plant to form a basin to hold water when watering.
- Water plant thoroughly to settle soil around roots
- If necessary, stake and tie plant to keep it in correct position until plant becomes established.
- Do not apply fertilizer for at least 3 months after planting to allow the plant to become established. After the plant has started to grow, follow the schedule and rate recommendations for the particular species.