



# White County Horticulture

## March Vol. 10 No. 3

### March Garden Calendar

Now is the time to plant cool season vegetables, from onions and potatoes to greens, cabbages and broccoli, and all the others thrown in. It is too early to plant the warm season lovers, like tomatoes and peppers, but there is still plenty to plant.

It won't be too long before we are harvesting the first crop of asparagus. When asparagus is in season, it requires a bit of attention. Harvesting every other day or so is needed to prevent the spears from becoming too large. You also want to stop harvesting when the spears are smaller than a pencil in diameter. For those who don't have an established asparagus bed, now would be a good time to plant one. One-year-old crowns are available at most nurseries and garden centers. Work up your soil and add some organic matter. Dig a trench and spread out the crowns, lightly covering them with soil. As they grow, continue to fill in with more soil until the trench is filled back up. We don't begin harvesting until the crowns are three years old.

We are getting pretty late in the season for herbicides to be very effective on winter weeds, but you still have time to put out a pre-emergent for summer weeds. Once winter weeds begin to bloom and set seeds, damage is done. Try to mow to keep weeds from setting seeds but hold off on using any fertilizer until your lawn grass has totally greened up—usually late April to early May. Putting out any fertilizer now is going to feed winter weeds, which don't need any encouragement.

There is still plenty of time to prune summer blooming plants including roses, butterfly bush, and summer spirea. All fruit trees, grape vines and blueberry bushes also need pruning every year.

Ornamentals won't bloom as well if you don't prune, and fruiting plants will not give you the quality fruit you want if you don't prune. Do try to get the pruning done by mid-March if you can. If needed, you can prune crape myrtles, althea and abelia now too, but don't touch the spring blooming shrubs. Those should be pruned after they bloom, not before. There may be some winter damage in landscapes on ornamentals. If you have spring blooming ornamentals such as loropetalum, azalea or gardenia with damaged leaves, take a "wait-and-see" approach. Hopefully the damage will be only cosmetic, and the plants will still have flowers, but you may have to prune more.

For many gardeners, winter annuals are beginning to make a slow comeback. Fertilize pansies and violas to encourage more blooms. If your plants look really bad and you need some quick color, consider putting in some short-season color plants like English primroses, calendula, and ranunculus. You may also be able to find some pansies, dianthus and snapdragons for extra color. They have at least two more months to bloom.

Spring bulbs should be going strong. We are well into daffodil season with tulips not too far away. Spring bulbs are an easy way to add color in a garden, but they do need to have six weeks of green growth after bloom to set flowers for next year. Crocus, daffodils and hyacinths will come back annually with minimal care, but tulips are a bit of a challenge. To ensure stunning color each spring, it is often best to plant new bulbs each fall.

We can all hope that the cold weather is behind us, but this is the month when we do still need to pay attention to weather forecasts. As plants are breaking dormancy, this is the time when they can

be the most sensitive to a late freeze. Have protection on hand if it is predicted to be cold.



### **Black Knot on Plum Trees**

With the leaves still off most fruit trees, homeowners are noticing black galls on their plums and cherries. Black knot caused by the fungus *Apiosporina morbosa* (*Dibotryon morbosum*) attacks stone fruits including plums, prunes, sweet cherries, and sour cherries. We rarely find it on peach. Black woody galls appear on the stems and branches. Badly infected trees may suffer extensive dieback of girdled limbs and stunting of growth beyond the knots. This can cause major yield loss. The knots begin as small, light brown swellings, generally located at the base of the leaf petiole or on the fruit spur. These appear during the summer and first year after infection. Young knots have an olive-green color, but later become hard, brittle and black in color. The knots are often asymmetrical, protruding more on one side of the affected branch than the other.

Control starts with good sanitation. All visible knots should be pruned out before new growth starts in the spring. Pruning cuts should be made at least 6-8 inches below the lowest part of the knot. Knots on large main branches and trunks may be cut out with a knife or chisel, including an inch of healthy bark around the knot. Avoid the purchase of plants showing knots or abnormal swellings on the twigs and branches. Burn, bury, or otherwise remove clippings from the property.

Mancozeb, Captan, Topsin M, or fungicides containing chlorothalonil are helpful in controlling

Black Knot if the cultural controls are also practiced. Apply first spray in the spring just as green tissue begins to appear. Spray again just before and after bloom. Spray at two-week intervals until new growth stops. Lime-sulfur sprayed during the dormant season is also helpful. Wild cherries and plums within 600 feet of the orchard should be removed if possible, to prevent spores blowing into the orchard and causing new infections.

Some Plum cultivars are resistant to Black knot. The cultivars Stanley, Damson, Bluefree, and Shropshire are considered highly susceptible; Fellenburg, Methley, Milton, Bradshaw, and Early Italian are moderately susceptible; Formosa, Shiro, and Santa Rose are slightly susceptible; and President is considered highly resistant. In general, Japanese varieties are less susceptible than most American varieties.

### **Planning Your Vegetable Garden**

I have been receiving several questions from first time vegetable growers. People are requesting information on how to get started and how to layout or plan a vegetable garden. First, consider the location of your garden. Do you have options on your property? Where do you get the most sun? Ideally, choose the sunniest part of the garden for your beds, away from frost pockets. Most vegetables need six to eight hours of direct sun a day! Orient the rows north/south which allow for maximum benefit of sunlight. Note that the south, east, and west sides of your home will get more sun than the north. How far away is the water? Make sure you have easy access to a hose or water source! It's important to water your vegetable plants at ground level through soaker hoses or drip irrigation. Keeping water off the leaves and plant canopies helps to lessen disease incidence.

Is there a spot near the house that would allow you to see outside that's easy to water and monitor daily? Perhaps a spot near your kitchen or a path you walk regularly would be a great garden spot. If you have too many shrubs or trees nearby, they may compete with your garden for

nutrients and moisture as well as sunlight. Avoid being too close to black walnut trees since all parts of the black walnut contain juglone. This is toxic to many plants including tomatoes. Many gardeners struggle with growing gardens near theirs or their neighbor's black walnut tree. Try growing your tomatoes at least 50 feet from the tree where the juglone concentration is greatest. However, some plants can tolerate juglone: Coneflower (*Echinacea*), Bee Balm (*Monarda* sp.), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), Violet (*Viola* sp.), and Grapes (*Vitus* sp.).

How large do you want your garden? It's better to start small and enjoy your success as your garden grows. If you're new to vegetable gardening, a 10' x 10' garden (100 square feet) is a great place to start. Growing in dedicated beds reduces soil compaction, helps to simplify crop rotation, and makes weeding and protecting your crops a snap. A simple bed system in your garden will make it easy to plan, tend and harvest your crops. Beds can be laid out at soil level or raised and should be no more than three to four feet wide to make it easy to reach into the center without stepping on the soil. The length of your beds should consider how far you are willing to walk to get around to the other side. A narrow bed also enables you to grow plants in blocks rather than rows, which helps suppress weeds and maximizes the number of plants you can grow in that space. Make each bed the same size to make it simple to move crops, row covers, and cloches from bed to bed as required. Be able to harvest from one side or the other.

You might consider making access paths between beds at least two feet wide to enable easy access for weeding and harvesting. Paths can be made of grass if they can be easily mown. Alternatively, lay cardboard and cover it with a mulch of wood chips, or pour a loose material such as gravel over weed-suppressing fabric. For a more permanent path surface, consider using brick or pavers.

For a beginner, pick three to five plants that you would like to grow, and buy three to five plants of each one. If you're growing annual plants (most vegetable seeds need to be planted each year),

then look at dedicated vegetable beds. For the perennials (such as asparagus or strawberries), you may want to dedicate a separate space to one side or their own beds. Grow tender plants such as tomatoes and peppers in the warmest, sunniest parts of the plot. Next, consider plants such as squash that need a lot of space. Add these near the edges of beds so they don't smother neighboring plants. Tall-growing climbers such as peas and pole beans should be located where they won't shade lower-growing vegetables. You may want to take advantage of potential shade to grow cool-season crops like lettuce and spinach, especially in hot climates. Plants that are regularly harvested and which don't need to be included in crop rotation, such as herbs and salad leaves, should be positioned in beds nearest to the kitchen. Consider pollination requirements. Corn, for example, is best grown in blocks rather than rows, as they are wind pollinated. Include pollinator plants and plenty of flowers such as calendula to attract beneficial insects to your garden and help improve pollination of fruit or pod-bearing crops!

Finally, if this isn't your first garden, think about where you planted your veggies last year, then be sure to rotate them to different beds for the coming season to help prevent diseases and avoid plant-hungry pests that overwinter in the soil.

### **Crapemyrtle bark scale treatment**

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.

*Photo: Texas A & M*

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 Bio Advanced™ 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.

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