

Horticulture 2014 Newsletter No. 11 March 18, 2014

Video of the Week: [Strawberries: Removing Mulch](#)

TURFGRASS

Core Aeration of Cool-Season Lawns



If you are planning to core-aerate your tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass lawn this spring, reserve a machine now so you can get the job done in March or early-April. Coring early in the spring gives cool-season lawns a chance to recover before crabgrass and other warm-season annual weeds start to germinate.

Core-aerating is one of the best things you can do for your lawn. It relieves compaction, hastens thatch decomposition, increases water infiltration and helps promote better root growth. Pay attention to the soil moisture level when coring.

The soil should easily crumble when worked between the fingers. If it is too wet, the machine's tines will plug and it will merely punch holes in the wet soil, which increases compaction. If it is too dry, the tines will not be able to penetrate very deeply. (Ward Upham)

VEGETABLES

Controlling Weeds in Home Garden Asparagus Beds



The best time to control weeds in asparagus is early spring before the asparagus emerges. A light tilling (or hoeing) that is shallow enough to avoid the crowns will eliminate existing weeds. Many gardeners like to mix in organic matter during the same operation.

Herbicides can be used before asparagus emerges. Glyphosate (Roundup, Killzall) will kill weeds that are actively growing, and the preemergence

herbicide trifluralin can be used to kill weed seeds as they germinate. Trifluralin is found in several products, but not all of them list asparagus on the label. Those that do have asparagus on the label include Miracle-Gro Weed Preventer Granules and Monterey Vegetable and Ornamental Weeder. Mulch can also be used to keep weeds from invading.

No herbicides can be used during harvest. The end of harvest presents another opportunity. Remove all fern and spears and apply Roundup to control virtually all of the weeds present. Or you may wish to apply mulch if it hasn't been already been applied.

Past the harvest season and after regrowth of the asparagus, options are limited. Products that contain sethoxydim can be applied to asparagus to kill grassy weeds. Sethoxydim has no effect on broadleaves including asparagus. Two sethoxydim products available to homeowners and labeled for asparagus are Monterey Grass Getter and Hi-Yield Grass Killer. With broadleaves, the only option is to pull them and look forward to next year. (Ward Upham)

Remove Fern and Fertilize Asparagus



If you haven't removed last year's growth from asparagus plants, now is the time. Asparagus comes up around the first of April in Manhattan but will be earlier in southern Kansas and a bit later further north.

Also, asparagus benefits from a fertilizer application early spring. Fertilize according to a soil test or add 1 to 2 pounds of a 10-20-10 fertilizer per 20 feet of row before growth starts. If a soil test shows that only nitrogen is needed, apply

1 pound of a 16-0-0 product or ½ pound of a 30-4-5, 27-3-3 or similar fertilizer per 20 feet of row. Incorporate lightly with a tiller or rake in fertilizer before spears emerge. Fertilize again at the same rate after the last harvest. (Ward Upham)

FRUIT

Pruning Young Fruit Trees

Young fruit trees should be pruned to begin developing a strong structure of the main or scaffold limbs. This will help prevent limb breakage over the years when the scaffolds carry a heavy fruit load. Apple, apricot, cherry, plum and pear trees generally are trained using the central leader system. The growth pattern for these trees is for a center branch to be dominant and to grow straight up.



Peach and nectarine trees are normally pruned using the open center method because they do not have a strong tendency for one shoot or branch to dominate the growth of other shoots or branches. In this system, the tree is pruned to a vase-like pattern with no central leader. Regardless of the system used, the three to four scaffold branches should:

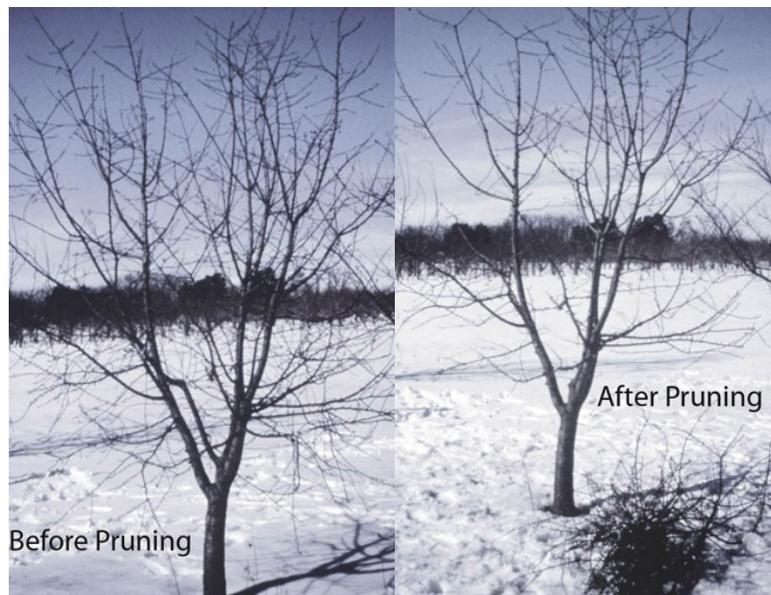
- Be no lower than 18 inches from the ground. This makes it easier to prune and harvest the tree once it matures.
- Form wide angles (about 60 to 80 degrees) with the trunk. Wide angles are much stronger than narrow angles and are less likely to break under wind or ice loads.
- Be distributed on different sides of the tree for good balance.
- Be spaced about 6 to 10 inches apart on the trunk with no branch directly opposite or below another. (Ward Upham)

Prune Fruit Trees Now

If you haven't pruned your fruit trees, now is the time. Following are some general recommendations on pruning mature fruit trees followed by more specific instructions on each species. If you have young fruit trees, see the accompanying article in this newsletter.

General Recommendations

- Take out broken, damaged or diseased branches.
- If two branches form a narrow angle, prune one out. Narrow angles are weak angles and tend to break during wind or ice storms.
- Take out all suckers. Suckers are branches that grow straight up. They may originate from the trunk or from major branches.
- If two branches cross and rub against one another, one should be taken out.
- Cut back or remove branches that are so low they interfere with harvest or pruning. If cutting back a branch, always cut back to another branch or a bud. Do not leave a stub.
- Cut back branches to reduce the total size of the tree, if necessary.
- Thin branches on the interior of the tree.



Follow the steps above in order but stop if you reach 30% of the tree. For a short video on pruning, see <http://www.hfr.ksu.edu/p.aspx?tabid=980&cat=Fruit&itemid=64&cmd=view#64>

Specific Instructions

Peach and Nectarine: Peach and nectarine require more pruning than any other fruit trees because they bear fruit on growth from the previous year. Not pruning results in fruit being borne further and further from the center of the tree allowing a heavy fruit crop to break major

branches due to the weight of the fruit. Prune long branches back to a shorter side branch.

Apple: Apples tend to become overgrown if not pruned regularly. Wind storms and ice storms are then more likely to cause damage. Also, trees that are not pruned often become biennial bearers. In other words, they bear a huge crop one year and none the next. Biennial bearing is caused by too many fruit on the tree. Though pruning helps, fruit often needs to be thinned as well. The goal is an apple about every 4 inches. Spacing can vary as long as the average is about every 4 inches.

Cherry, Pear, Plum: Light pruning is usually all that is needed. (Ward Upham)

Strawberry Planting and Mulch Removal



New strawberry plantings should be set early in the growing season so that mother plants become established while the weather is still cool. The mother plants develop a strong root system during this cool period when soil temperatures are between 65 and 80 degrees F. The most appropriate planting time is mid- to late March in southern Kansas and late March to mid-April in the northern areas of the state.

Later in the season, runners and daughter plants develop. The earlier the mother plants are set, the sooner the first daughter plant will be formed and take root. These first daughter plants will be the largest plants at the end of the growing season and will bear more berries per plant the following spring.

When planting is done later, the higher temperatures stress the mother plants resulting in reduced growth, weaker mother plants and delays in daughter plant formation. Fewer and smaller daughter plants produce fewer berries, resulting in a smaller crop.

Remove all flowers during the first year. New plants have limited energy reserves that need to go toward establishing the mother plants and making runners rather than making fruit. If fruit is allowed to develop the first year, the amount of fruit produced the second year is drastically reduced due to smaller, weaker daughter plants.

Research in Illinois has shown that the straw mulch should be removed from strawberry plants when the soil temperature is about 40 degrees F. Fruit production drops if the mulch remains as the soil temperature increases. There are likely to be freezing temperatures that will injure or kill blossoms, so keep the mulch between rows to conveniently recover the berries when freezing temperatures are predicted. (Ward Upham)

MISCELLANEOUS

Transplant Solutions and Sidedressing

Transplant solutions are mild fertilizer solutions that are applied to newly transplanted vegetables and flowers. Transplant solutions are also called starter solutions or root stimulators. Plants not



given a transplant solution often develop a purplish tinge to the leaves caused by a phosphorus deficiency. Surprisingly, the soil may have plenty of phosphorus but plants often have difficulty taking up nutrients in cool soils. The starter solution places soluble nutrients near the roots so the plants get off to a good, strong start.

Transplant solutions (root stimulators) are available for sale but it is also possible to make your own transplant solution from a fertilizer that contains more phosphorus than nitrogen or potassium such as a 5-10-5, 10-20-10 or 11-15-11. Mix 2 to 3 tablespoons of one of the above fertilizers in a gallon of water several hours before use. The fertilizer won't completely dissolve but enough will go into solution to get plants off to a good start. Use about 1 cup of transplant solution for each transplant.

Sidedressing is a fertilization done after the plants are established. A fertilizer containing primarily nitrogen is used to keep plants growing and productive. Nitrate of soda (16-0-0) is often used at the rate of 2 pounds fertilizer per 100 feet of row. More commonly available lawn fertilizers such as a 30-3-3, 29-5-4 or something similar can also be used but cut the rate in half. Be sure any lawn fertilizer used does not contain weed preventers or weed killers. Note that most fertilizers weigh about 1 pound per pint of product.

We have a sidedressing sheet available that lists crops, rate of fertilizer application and timing of application(s) for many common vegetables as well as annual flowers. The sheet can be viewed at <http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/doc1991.ashx> (Ward Upham)

Contributors: Ward Upham, Extension Associate

To view Upcoming Events: <http://tinyurl.com/fswqe>

The web version includes color images that illustrate subjects discussed. To subscribe to this newsletter electronically, send an e-mail message to cdipman@ksu.edu or wupham@ksu.edu listing your e-mail address in the message.

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