TIPS ON PRUNING FRUIT TREES/VINES

Pruning fruit trees is essential for several reasons but the main one is, “if you can’t reach the fruit, what good is having it”. A good thing to remember about pruning, and this is also true for ornamental trees, is that it actually stimulates the tree to begin budding. A plant/tree grows under the ground as well as above the ground. Because the tree/plant needs leaves to photosynthesize and make carbohydrates for energy to feed the wood and roots and the roots obtain soil nutrients and water to send to the leaves, the root mass typically grows in proportion to the mass of top growth. The above ground and below ground parts tend to stay equalized as the plant grows. When you remove top growth through pruning, the plant naturally wants to generate enough new growth to regain the balance with the root mass. Pruning too early might cause the plant to prematurely generate tender young shoots during a warm period just to have them frozen back by the next freeze. Fruit trees and muscadines are generally pruned around the last week of February or first week of March because, in our area, this is late enough to avoid hard freeze damage to new growth but early enough so the plant is still dormant.

If you have several trees and vines to prune, you should start early enough to be finished by early March. When done properly, pruning can take more time than you think, especially if you only work in the afternoon when it’s warmest.

Apples, pears and pecans require a central leader, a main stem/trunk that runs up the center of the tree. All the other limbs should be pruned to be lower than this central leader. Prune off any small branches that are turned down or toward the center so you can achieve the “up and out” growth.

Peaches and plums prefer the “open bowl” type pruning. Take out all branches/limbs turning downward or growing toward the center and prune out anything in the middle of the tree so it has the ‘bowl’ shape with limbs around the edge but open in the middle.

Muscadines grow on wood that is one year old, not on the wood it puts on this year. That is why you should prune all the long growth from last year back to about 2-3 inches leaving only 2-3 buds. These buds are where the fruit will set for this year.

Blueberries and blackberries are a little different and you have to prune for cane renewal which means you cut about a third of the canes back rather severely but leave the others. The next year, you’ll cut a different third of the canes. This process enables you to continue getting fruit while pruning back the entire bush over a three year period.

Make all pruning cuts ‘flush’ with the limb where they originate. The more ‘flush’ the cut, the better the tree will heal itself and there is no need to apply any type of pruning “paint”. If the cuts “bleed” a little, that just means the ground is full of water and you shouldn’t worry. This type of sap “bleeding” is common and no vine has ever bled to death!

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ANY TYPE OF PRUNING, EXTENSION HAS SOME VERY GOOD BROCHURES WITH PICTURES TO HELP GUIDE YOU. YOU MAY COME BY THE OFFICE OR CALL AND GIVE US YOUR ADDRESS TO RECEIVE THIS INFORMATION. ALSO, I WILL BE GLAD TO VISIT WITH YOU ON THE PHONE OR IN THE OFFICE.

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