



Pest Corner

May, 2006

Facts and figures for May's article were condensed from information contained in articles written by Don Tapio, Grays Harbor County Extension Agent.

Anticipating "Pesky" Weather Surprises?

Research at the University of Vermont has shown that lilacs are highly accurate weather indicators. Unlike thermometers, barometers and other weather instruments, lilacs reflect the combined effects of all weather factors - temperature, rainfall, humidity wind, and sunshine. Phenology is the study of the relationship between climate and biological events such as the blooming of lilacs. Chinese gardeners were planting by phenological calendars some 3,000 years ago; and many home gardeners still plant corn when oak leaves are the size of a mouse's ear. In Montana, lilac observers discovered that the alfalfa weevil appears 10 days after the first lilac blooms. In Vermont, the development of lilac leaves may predict when McIntosh apple leaves will bloom. These observation allows orchardists to prepare by putting out beehives for pollination. It appears that cool-weather crops (lettuce, root crops, and peas) may be planted when lilacs are at the first leaf stage. Beans, cucumbers and other tender crops would wait until the lilacs are in full bloom. However, rules of thumb are not infallible. Even lilacs get blasted by a late frost, and researchers have yet to determine whether the same rules apply everywhere.

Blue-Blooming and Other Prolific Weeds

Creeping Speedwell is a common spring-blooming weed in Western Washington. It is an aggressive grower in home lawns. Most of the herbicides commonly used on turf grass such as 2,4-D and MCPA do not control Creeping Speedwell. WSU currently lists DCPA (Dacthal), Dthiopyr (Dimension) and isoxaben (Gallery) as providing effective control when used according to labeled directions. If the infestation is small enough, hand digging may provide the best control option.

Weed scientists frequently refer to existing weeds seeds in soil as the "Weed Bank". "Pesky" weeds in vegetable gardens include Pigweed, Lambs quarter, and Dandelion. A Pigweed plant produces 118,000 seeds which may survive in the soil 10 years; a Lambs quarter plant produces 72,000 seeds that may remain viable for 40 years; and a Dandelion plant produces 15,000 seeds which remain viable for 6 years. With every tilling of the soil a percentage of the dormant weed seeds are exposed to the soil surface to germinate and grow. Constant hoeing is advisable.

Pests on Douglas Fir, Spruce, Pine and other Conifers

Chewing damage indicates the presence of the Silver-spotted Tiger Moth larvae. The chewing damage is limited and usually not very serious. Home gardeners can prevent additional feeding damage by simply pruning out the infested branch and destroying the insects. The larvae is not known to feed on garden plants other than these conifers.

Answers for the “pesky” Pruning Questions

A reminder that WSU Extension has a couple of excellent resources to help guide you through the pruning process. They include Pacific Northwest Bulletin Number 0400 titled: Training and Pruning Your Home Orchard which is available for \$2.50. Pruning Apple Trees- Basic Concepts, a 24- minute video, is also available at a cost of \$15.00. Both are available through the Publications office at Washington State University by dialing 1-800-723-1763. Place online orders at <http://pubs.wsu.edu>

Sawdust as an Amendment

Sawdust is readily available and cheap; however, it is the least desirable source of organic matter. Sawdust ties up N as it decomposes in the soil causing plants to suffer from nitrogen deficiency. The N deficiency from sawdust decomposition often lasts 2-4 years requiring additional nitrogen to supply plant needs. N deficiency (pale green leaves and slow growth) is usually most apparent during the summer when sawdust decomposition is fastest and plant demand for N is greatest. When sawdust is added to garden soil, make sure you add N in doses of one pound of this element per 1,000 square feet of garden as needed. For instance, a sack of fertilizer labeled as 8-8-8 contains eight percent (.08) of Nitrogen. To add 1 lb of N per 1,000 sq. ft. of this 8-8-8 formulation, you would incorporate 12.5 pounds. The calculation is: 1 (the amount recommended per 1,000 sq. ft.) divided by .08 (the 8 percent ratio of N) equals 12.5 lbs.

Pest Corner is the title of a series of gardening articles which appears in the Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties Master Gardener Newsletter.