



Pest Corner

July, 2008

“Fertilizing, Surface Tree Roots, and What to Prune”, information adapted by Cecilia from recent articles by Don Tapio, GH County Extension Agent.

Fertilizing

Recommendation below is for dry fertilizer of the 5-10-10 formula.

Vegetable garden: For shortseason vegetables (radishes, spinach, lettuce, etc.) apply 2 to 3 pounds of 5-10-10 per 100 feet of row soon after planting. Place the fertilizer in a band 2 to 3 inches to the side of the row. Note: I do not plant a 100-foot row of anything, my rows are at the most 10 feet long. Thus, a three-pound box of fertilizer should last me for ten applications. I remind myself not to over fertilize, and/or follow the printed instructions in a container.

For long-season vegetables (corn, tomatoes, potatoes, etc.) apply 3 to 4 pounds of 5-10-10 per 100 feet of row soon after planting. Place the fertilizer 2 to 3 inches out from the row.

Flower Beds: Apply 3 pounds of 5-10-10 per 100 square feet. Apply the fertilizer as a topdressing between plants.

Fruit Trees: Fruit trees normally do not need fertilization. If trees made less than one foot of new growth the previous season, apply 2 pounds of 5-10-10 fertilizer per inch of trunk diameter three feet above the ground. Place the fertilizer in a ring around the drip line of the tree.

Trees and Surface Roots

Most of a tree’s root system, even in a large tree, is in the top two to three feet of soil. Just as the trunk of the tree grows in girth with age, so do the roots. Roots in a lawn grow to the surface searching the abundant water and fertilizer. In addition, since roots respire, they grow best where there is abundant oxygen. That’s why surface rooting is a greater problem in our coastal area where clay soils are abundant. Tree roots must grow near the surface because there is little oxygen for good root growth deeper down.

Prevention: Choose plant tree species that are least prone to surface rooting. Another solution is to plant a perennial groundcover beneath the tree rather than grass. Most groundcovers are taller than grass and will hide the surface roots. These plants must be shade tolerant and able to compete with vigorous tree roots. Recommended groundcovers include Begonia, Sweet Woodruff, Daylily, Forget-me-not, Pachysandra, Lungwort and Periwinkle. Do not mound up the soil over the roots to create a raised bed planter. Minimize root damage by plug planting. Dig small holes, only as large as needed for planting. Adding a mulch will reduce weeds, conserve moisture and improve the soil for both the tree and groundcover.

Applying a shallow 1-inch layer of good quality soil mix and planting grass is a temporary solution. In a short time, roots will reappear as they continue to grow in girth. A better solution to surface rooting is to cover the roots with a porous and well-drained mulch (roots need to breathe) such as wood chips or beauty bark.

Most important, always leave surface roots in place: Do not cut them off, or injure them because the tree will suffer serious damage!

Prune Spring Blooming Shrubs after Flowers Fade

Spring was late to start and so is summer. Most Spring Blooming shrubs are done blooming and may be pruned to ensure a vigorous summer growth which provides flower buds for the following year. Although late winter is traditionally the time for pruning chores, many of our spring blooming shrubs are best pruned immediately after the flowers fade. Trees and shrubs that bloom in early spring, like forsythia, lilac, rhododendrons and azaleas develop their flower buds during the summer and fall of the previous year. This is often called "blooming on old wood." Therefore, as a general rule, shrubs that flower before June 15 should be pruned soon after blooming.