

April 2009

Woody Ornamental Landscape Plant Tips

Culture

- Now that it is warmer and the soil has fully thawed, it is an ideal time to plant new or transplant trees and shrubs. When carrying newly purchased trees always hold them by the root ball or container and not by the trunk. Buying containerized trees and shrubs is very popular. Sometimes they are pot-bound. Be sure to spread the roots open. This will help assure that the roots will spread out properly and not grow into a tight self-constricting clump of roots. Plants grown as ball and burlap do not require spreading the roots but do need to have the ropes removed and the burlap loosened from around the trunk.
- Try to choose quality trees from the nursery. Shade trees should have a single, straight trunk. Contrary to popular belief it is unnecessary to prune or top a newly planted tree. Obviously damaged or rubbing branches, however, should be removed. Common planting mistakes include planting in compacted or poorly drained soil, planting too deep and buying damaged trees with poor root systems. It is also important to keep newly planted trees well watered. Typically, the staking of newly planted trees is not needed. New trees that are allowed to move a little by the wind actually develop better roots and a stronger trunk than those that are securely staked.
- Trees can be pruned now. Remove tree branches broken by winter weather, prune out dead or diseased branches and make any necessary cosmetic cuts. It is not necessary to paint pruning wounds. In fact, wound dressings will impede the natural healing process. You may notice excessive sap bleeding from pruning cuts on elm, maple, birch, dogwood, beech, walnut, magnolia, tulip poplar and redbud. This bleeding is harmless to the tree. To avoid reducing the bloom of spring flowering plants, prune them after they bloom.
- Prune out winter burn damage on hollies and other evergreen shrubs. Remove shrub branches broken by winter weather, prune out dead or damaged branches and make any necessary cosmetic cuts.
- Rhododendrons and azaleas can be fertilized with a balanced fertilizer after the bloom period.
- Roses are available now in nurseries and garden centers as bare-rooted or potted plants. Select plants with 4-5 large canes coming from the base. Choose a sunny site, at least 6 hours of direct sun, dig a large hole, mix a starter fertilizer into the planting soil and plant so that the crown is one inch above the soil grade. Keep newly planted roses well watered. It's time to begin spraying or treating roses with a systemic fungicide if they are varieties susceptible to black spot disease; spray when leaves are fully expanded. Rose plants should also be fertilized at this time with a balanced fertilizer.
- Now is the time to prune roses. As they are budding you can more easily determine what is live wood and what has been killed by the winter. Prune winter damaged canes of non-climbing roses back to healthy wood or to only a few inches above the soil to reduce the size of the rose. Prune climbers back only to living wood, not to the ground.

Insects

- Continue to remove and destroy bagworm bags from affected trees- principally on evergreens. The bags contain hundreds of eggs that will hatch out and feed later this spring. Make sure to dispose of these bags; don't just throw them on the ground because they will still hatch.
- Scale insects are small sucking insects that cause considerable damage to many woody plants. Unlike other insects the adults have no legs but remain stationary on the stems protected by a small cover that helps them blend in with the plant's bark. Common types of scales include pine needle scale, hemlock scale, euonymus scale and others. They can be controlled by with a summer rate application (see product label) of horticultural oil.

Educating People To Help Themselves

Local Governments - U.S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating

- The gypsy moth is making a come-back in many areas. Carefully inspect trees for gypsy moth egg masses. They are tan colored, felt-like and 1-2 inches long, and may be found on tree bark, firewood or any outdoor, wooden structure. Remove and destroy them now as they will be hatching this month.
- Eastern tent caterpillar eggs are hatching this month and the larvae are feeding on cherry and crabapple leaves. You may notice small webs developing at the ends of branches. Trees can generally withstand the damage; a non-toxic control is simply to remove the webs with a stick or a pole. They are not a serious threat like the gypsy moth. Trees that are stripped of leaves always recover nicely. However if your infested trees are prime landscape features and are heavily infested, you can control them now, while the larvae are young, with a spray application of the microbial insecticide, B.t.(var. kurstaki).
- Aphid colonies usually begin feeding on tender new growth in April. Aphids are small, pear-shaped soft-bodied insects that come in many different colors and suck the plant sap from a wide variety of plant leaves. They may cause leaves to pucker, twist or curl downwards. Though the damage may seem alarming at first, often if you wait, beneficial predator insects, such as lady bird beetles, hover fly larvae, green lace wing larvae, and parasitic wasps can effectively control the aphid pests. Insecticide treatments are usually not necessary for this reason, as well as for the fact that they would also kill the 'good' or beneficial insects that are helpful in the garden. The affected plant parts quickly grow out of the damage.
- The tiny reddish brown eggs of spruce spider mites can be seen with a hand lens on the twigs and needles of spruce at this time. Two-spotted spider mites can be very damaging later this summer. If you notice signs of these pests, apply an ultra-fine horticultural oil spray that will kill the adults and eggs.

Disease

- Crabapple trees are truly very beautiful in spring bloom. Unfortunately, most are also very susceptible to two fungal diseases: cedar-apple rust and apple scab. Both diseases cause the leaves to drop off in mid summer. You can either follow a rigorous spray program or simply accept the defoliation. The trees always recover the next year. The best option is to replace these troublesome trees with disease resistant varieties that require no spraying.
- April is the month that cedar-apple rust disease forms its galls on Virginia cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*). The odd-looking galls are at first bright orange gelatinous balls with long "horns" or projections; they later turn brown and become hard. They are the alternate host structure for a disease that does no harm to the junipers but is more destructive to apple trees, including crabapples, and hawthorns. Another rust, cedar-quince, causes rusty red swellings on juniper and causes fruit damage and branch dieback on hawthorn.
- Powdery mildew of native dogwood is a very early season type of powdery mildew.
- This is a new emerging disease appearing in our region. It disfigures the new growth by causing it to become distorted and wilted. Patches of white powdery fungal growth is also found on the upper surface of the leaves. Symptoms begin appearing in late April and May continue throughout the summer and fall. Over fertilization that results in succulent new growth is particularly susceptible. Provide good air circulation by removing suckers and over dense growth. Several dogwood cultivars have been identified as resistant. They are: Cherokee Brave, and the Jean's Appalachian, Karen's Appalachian, Kay's Appalachian and Appalachian Joy.

Have a pest or gardening question?
Call the Home and Garden Information Center
800-342-2507
www.hgic.umd.edu