

Good Growing with the Wexford Conservation District

TO DO THIS MONTH – Prune Fruit Trees

The first day of spring is a great time to prune fruit trees

General Pruning Tips

1. Prune in March to avoid problems with disease.
2. Use by-pass rather than anvil pruners to avoid crushing the wood.
3. Keep your tools sharp so that they will make clean cuts.
4. Always sterilize tools when moving from one tree to another to avoid spreading disease. Isopropyl alcohol works well.
5. Prune to outward-facing buds.
6. Remove all dead, diseased, broken, or oozing branches.
7. Do not use wound paint.
8. Heading cuts shorten a branch and promote the growth of new side branches. Thinning cuts remove an entire branch.
9. For the 1st – 3rd years, the focus is on building a strong scaffold system and ensuring good light penetration to all the areas.
10. It takes about 4 years to put in place a good, strong scaffold system. After that, only maintenance pruning to produce fruit is usually needed.
11. All fruit trees except peaches produce fruit on wood that is at least 2 years old.
12. You can prune fruit trees to keep them under 5' feet tall so that they are easier to manage.
13. For older trees, remove large branches by first making a cut 4" away from the main stem, and then make a second cut to remove the stub. This (along with making undercuts) helps prevent the bark from ripping.

IN THE KNOW – Optimizing Fruit Tree Health

- Preventing disease is key!!! Keep your trees as healthy as possible!!!
- Lay out the orchard so that there is good air circulation around the trees
- Prune so there is good air circulation around trees
- Consider disease resistant varieties
 - Apples – Freedom, Liberty, Goldrush, JonaFree, Pristine
 - Peach – Madison, Harrow Beauty, Early Redhaven
 - Pears – Blake's Pride, Kieffer
- Test your soil and add nutrients per soil test recommendations
- If on sandy ground, you will probably need to both irrigate and add organic matter
- For home orchardists, bagging individual fruits on the tree right after petal fall / shuck split can be a good way to prevent insect attacks. There are fabric and paper versions of these. Homemade version is to dunk nylon footies in clay powder (Surround Wettable Powder) until saturated; allow to dry.
- Clean up orchard in the fall removing fallen leaves and dropped fruit.

CROP OF THE MONTH – Raspberries & Blackberries

- All brambles do best on lighter soils. They are prone to disease if planted in heavy soils.
- Like all other perennials, prepping the soil before you plant will give you much greater success. Eliminate the weeds and add nutrients per soil test recommendations.
- There are two types of red raspberries. Those that fruit on 2-year old canes (floricanes) are the most common and are called summer-bearing. Those that fruit on first year canes (primocanes) are called fall-bearers. North of US 10, look for “early” fall-bearers.
- Set raspberry plants out 2-3’ apart in rows with at least 5’ between rows.
- Most red raspberry patches need to have the canes thinned out heavily so that there is good air circulation (1 or 2 canes per square foot). Do this in the spring.
- Black raspberries (also known as black caps because they are hollow in the center) grow in clumps. Thin to just 5 or 6 canes per clump in the spring. In late June when the new canes have reached about 4’ in length, prune about 6” off the tips to encourage the production of side branches that will bear fruit next year.
- It can be difficult to grow blackberries north of US 10 as the blackberry plants you can purchase are rarely hardy that far north. You’re better off harvesting from wild patches
- Trellising brambles helps produce better fruit – the canes aren’t whipped around by the wind if they are trellised. Plus the fruit stays cleaner and is easier to pick. A two-wire trellis can be very helpful.
- Berries are ripe when a very gently pull will remove them from the plant.

Next Month:

Things to Do: Plant perennials and cold tolerant crops

In the Know: Soil vs. Dirt

Crop of the Month: Lettuce