

Can You Dig It?

By Schann Nelson, OSU Master Gardener



Ah, spring! Not quite yet, but definitely on its way. Daffodils are in bloom in many places, or just waiting for a hot day. To say that the weather is changeable is an enormous understatement! Western Oregon, at this time of year has every kind of weather, from snow and sleet to warm and balmy enough to get a sunburn! All of this wonderful variety can and does occur within a single day and at the same time across the landscape. It's not unusual for one side of the house to be warm and sunny while the opposite side is dark and rainy. Weird and amazing it is, but not really unusual! This is why we can truly say, "If you don't like the weather wait a few minutes!"

Time to put dreamy books and catalogues away (at least when the sun is out) and get busy. If you can find them, or grow them, brasicas's plants can be set out soon. I've had some success with planting seed under hot caps. Pansies and primroses can be put out to complement the daffodils and will help hide the leaves of daffodils after the flowers are gone. About the only way I know to seriously stress daffodils is to cut, or mow, the foliage back before it has time to feed the bulbs.

I planted pea seed in a sunny bed the other day, using my new early season technique of NOT presoaking the seed. Hopefully, this will prevent the low percentage of viable plants I have been getting from early sowing. I also used my mulching technique, scattering the seed onto an evenly raked bed of soil and loosely covering with mulch instead of soil. This technique worked great with bush beans and the cats don't like the mulch. They will sleep on it if it's sunny, but at least they don't dig it all up for their personal use.

Definitely time to finish pruning, winter spraying and cleaning up the yard and garden. Since our winters have become so mild, it's hard to figure out when to spray what. A dormant oil spray controls over-wintering mites, aphids and scale, but does little to inhibit the rampant growth of blights, mildews, rots and other fungal diseases. Dormant oil is often sprayed in combination with lime sulfur, which will help control fungi. If dormant oil and lime sulfur are properly applied they can control two of our most common problems – scab and powdery mildew on apples and pears. Unfortunately, it requires multiple applications carefully timed to correspond to at least three stages of blossom (popcorn, full bloom and petal fall), in addition to a dormant application for insect control. Now really, who has enough time to spray this often? There are other ways of controlling pests and diseases.

Foremost among control strategies is good sanitation. Leaves from diseased fruit trees should be raked and destroyed, not composted. I'm terrible about this and thus have a greater problem with fungal diseases than I might if I religiously raked and removed leaves and other dead stuff. This would be easier if the leaves all fell off the trees at the same time. Unfortunately, leaves continue to fall throughout the winter and I hate to rake.

Pruning is a good way to optimize tree health, increase production and improve appearance. Trees require good exposure to sunlight throughout the entire canopy to ensure good fruit production, and good air circulation is essential to the control of disease. Many people are mystified by pruning and hack away willy-nilly when a tree is too tall, or overcrowded, or too shady. This is not a good idea and rarely yields good results in the long run.

A careful and systematic approach will yield better results. I study the 'bones' of my trees every time I walk the yard to figure out what to prune. I've also made a lot of mistakes over the years, like removing fruiting spurs or leaving stubs that prevent good healing. I've learned to preserve the desired shape by thinning branches, cut at an angle to prevent water build-up and to cut to the branch collar. (See figure 1) This collar is the transition area between the trunk and branch and contains very strong wood with natural chemical protection. Cutting flush to the trunk increases the injury and opens a path for infestation. Cutting too far away from the collar will leave an unsightly 'stub' that will die back to the collar eventually, and may prevent the collar from growing over the cut and enclosing the dead area. Painting the cuts does no good, and can even seal moisture in, increasing the chance of rot. Figure 2 shows the proper technique for cutting large branches.

Another common error is cutting off the ends of branches, called heading, which increases the number of new shoots, particularly vigorous upright shoots called water sprouts, and stiffens existing branches. While this may be desirable at certain times, particularly in ornamental rather than fruit-producing trees, in general it is better to leave a terminal bud in place. These buds on the

end of branches produce hormones that suppress sprouting and reduce the amount of future pruning needed to maintain the desired size and shape.

In general, young trees and shrubs should be very lightly pruned and only to develop sound scaffold (main) branches with good spacing, both vertically along the main trunk and around the circumference as viewed from the top. An exception with a young tree is if it has two equally dominate tops coming from a central base trunk at a very narrow angle. This narrow angle creates an area where water can accumulate and bark is forced to grow within the crotch of the tree. This greatly weakens the tree and may result in half of the tree succumbing to excess weight and breaking off, leaving an unsightly wound and a weirdly shaped tree. Take a deep breath, choose one of these to become a central leader and cut off the other. As all of the energy from the roots goes into the single trunk, the small wound will disappear within a year or two, leaving a strong, straight trunk.

Pruning is a vast subject. There are many books and articles written about why and how, where and when to prune. Most trees are very forgiving and will survive drastic pruning. If you pay attention to the results, you will discover the form that supplies the result you want. Less pruning usually gives better results than more pruning. Drastic renovation should take place over several years to revitalize old trees unpruned for many years. Not all pruning should happen in the winter, either. Winter pruning

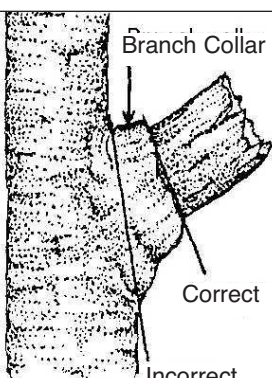


Figure 1.—Remove branches flush with the collar, not flush with the trunk.

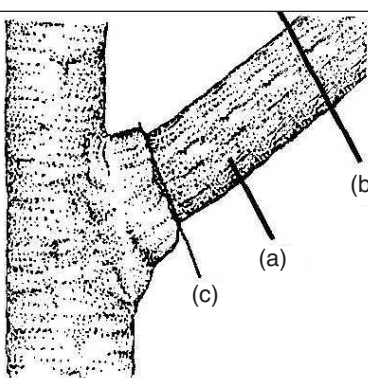


Figure 2.—Pruning a large branch: (a) Undercut one-third of the way through the branch. (b) Cut through until the branch falls away. (c) Cut back to the collar.

stimulates growth, summer pruning is more likely to reduce the size of a tree. Be careful not to prune off next season's flowers. Many landscape trees grown for their flowers (including lilacs, azaleas, rhododendrons, daphne, forsythia, viburnum and mock orange) bloom on last season's growth. This is also true for prunes and plums.

Trees are complex, but offer rewards that other smaller and shorter lived plants do not. They are worthy of your attention and patience. Planting and caring for trees is a statement of belief in the future. Lord knows we all need to reinforce our belief in the future as our damp, cold spring drags on and on.

Church Directory

NEHALEM VALLEY BIBLE CHURCH

Gary Taylor, Pastor
Grant & North Streets, Vernonia
503 429-5378
Sunday School 10:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Nursery available
Wednesday Service 7:00 p.m.

VERNONIA FOURSQUARE CHURCH

Carl Pense, Pastor
850 Madison Avenue, Vernonia
503 429-1103
Sunday Worship Service: 10:30 a.m.
Children's Sunday School

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS

Marc Farmer, Branch President
1350 E. Knott Street, Vernonia
503 429-7151
Sacrament Meeting, Sunday 10 a.m.
Sunday School & Primary 11:20 a.m.
Relief Society, Priesthood and
Young Women, Sunday 12:10 p.m.

SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST

2nd Ave. and Nehalem St., Vernonia
503 429-8301
Morning Worship, 11:00 a.m.
Bible Study 9:15 a.m.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Wayne and Maureen Marr
662 Jefferson Ave., Vernonia,
503 429-0373
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.

VERNONIA CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Sam Hough, Evangelist
410 North Street, Vernonia
503 429-6522
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Morning Worship 11:00 a.m.
Every Wednesday:
Ladies' Bible Study 9:30 a.m.
Ladies' Worship 10:00 a.m.
Children's Choir 3:00 p.m.
Family Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

359 "A" Street, Vernonia
503 429-5190
Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
Sunday Worship Service 11:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer Meeting 7:00 p.m.

ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Rev. Luan Tran, Administrator
960 Missouri Avenue, Vernonia
503 429-8841
Mass Sunday 12:00 Noon
Religious Educ. Sunday 10:30 a.m.

VERNONIA COMMUNITY CHURCH

Grant Williams, Pastor
957 State Avenue, Vernonia
503 429-6790
Sunday Breakfast 9:00 a.m.
Morning Worship 9:45 a.m.
Children and Nursery 10:00 a.m.
Youth Group 6:00 p.m.
Preschool Tues. & Thurs. 9:00 a.m.
Wednesday Prayer 7:00 p.m.
Friday Adult Volleyball 7:00 p.m.