

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

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the Cochise County Master Gardener

NEWSLETTER

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FEBRUARY 1990

WHAT TO DO --- WHAT TO DO --- WHAT TO DO --- FEBRUARY

Jackie Dillon-Fast
Staff Writer

In general, February is a quiet month for gardens and a good time to catch up on gardening chores you put off during January. Most of the projects listed in last month's column can still be started in February, but by the end of this month (if not sooner) you should have finished your winter pruning and bare-root planting.

> WINTER PRUNING: Pruning of deciduous trees should be finished by the middle of February. If you wait any longer, you may be removing buds as well as branches.

> PRUNING ROSE BUSHES: We recommend holding off on heavy pruning of your roses until the end of this month and into early March. Choosing the best time to prune roses is extremely difficult. It should be done two weeks before the buds appear, and not even Houdini can accurately predict when that might be. Next month we will feature an article on pruning roses.

> COLD-MOIST STRATIFY SEEDS: There is still time to cold-stratify seeds for sowing indoors in March. Check seed packets and gardening books for information on whether a particular seed needs to be cold-stratified, as well as for how long, and plan your cold-stratifying and sowing dates around this information. The seeds need to be placed in a sterile growing medium such as peat moss or vermiculite (although paper towels also work), and kept moist.

> PLANT BARE-ROOT TREES: Remember to provide a large enough hole for your tree. It may seem like a lot of extra work at planting time, but in two or three years your tree's roots will have outgrown a smaller planting

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hole. This is especially true if you have heavy clay soil or caliche deposits, and if you added improved soil only to that small space, the roots will have trouble growing beyond the confines of the initial hole. The tree may appear healthy for those two or three years, and then mysteriously begin to decline. The larger the tree will be at full size, the larger its root system will need to be, and the larger you should make your planting hole.

> **PREPARE SPRING PLANTING BEDS:** Break up and prepare the soil in new planting beds, adding soil amendments and organic matter, compost, or well-rotted manure.

> **CLEAN AND REPAIR DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEMS:** Check hoses for leaks and emitters for clogged ends.

> **FINALIZE SPRING GARDEN PLANS:** Begin collecting seeds for spring (cool season) vegetable gardens. Decide if you'll want any major changes in your landscape or garden this year. Spend some time thinking about your gardens and how you might solve any problems you had last year.

> **KEEP WATERING:** In an arid environment, it is risky to set watering guidelines; so much depends on the type of plant, how long it has been in your garden, the amount of rain we've had, wind, sun, and soil conditions, and whether you deep or surface water. The most foolproof method to watering is to check each plant with a soil probe or metal rod. Press the probe into the soil around your tree as far down as it will go. The easier the probe moves through the soil, the moister the soil is. If you get strong resistance in the first foot or two of soil around your trees, they need deep watering. They will probably need deep watering at least once a month throughout the winter.



Jackie's idea

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Articles to be published in next month's newsletter must be received at the Sierra Vista Extension Office no later than February 16.

HOME GARDENER Q & A COLUMN

Jackie Dillon-Fast
Staff Writer

Each month we will feature three or four questions from home gardeners that were phoned in to the Cooperative Extension Office or submitted in writing to the newsletter staff. Answers will come from extension service representatives, other Master Gardeners, area nurseries and industries, and commercial growers.

Q. *I have never found seeds on my Texas Ranger shrubs or noticed any volunteer seedlings around mature plants. I've never even seen the seeds advertised in seed catalogs. Where can I find Texas Ranger seeds or seedlings?*

A. Texas Ranger (*Leucophyllum frutescens*) seeds are extremely tiny and very difficult to collect and germinate. For this reason, nurseries propagate Texas Ranger from softwood cuttings rather than from seed. Area nurseries carry Texas Ranger shrubs from April to September. You can try rooting a cutting from your established plant.

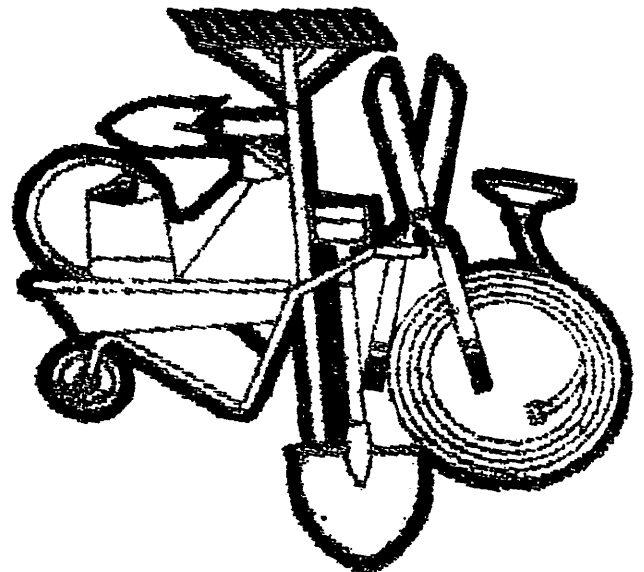
Q. *One California arboretum excludes tomato and potato clippings from its compost piles because these greens, in their fresh form, are poisonous to people. Can solanine really survive composting and be taken up in unhealthy amounts by other vegetables?*

A. No, solanine is an alkaloid that breaks down in the soil or in a compost pile. It is not absorbed by other vegetables. The only organic waste materials that should not be added to a compost pile are meat, grease, eggs, cheese, bones (bone meal is okay), and dog or cat manure.

Q. *Years ago gardening magazines recommended that colored newsprint not be composted for vegetables or made into newspaper logs for fireplace burning. Does colored newsprint still contain toxins?*

A. Yes, colored inks contain hazardous chemicals that can leach out into your soil or compost pile. Black newsprint generally is safe for use in gardens as mulch though it adds very little to your soil itself. An informal poll of area printers turned up three who would not recommend burning colored newsprint in fireplaces, and one who does so routinely. Since I was not able to find a definitive answer, it would be best to assume that colored newsprint is hazardous and not to burn it in your fireplace. It is easy enough to separate it from the black newsprint that forms the bulk of your newspaper.

[An interesting note: One of our Master Gardeners has been burning potato peels in her fireplace for years. She says it helps remove deposits from inside her chimney. I wasn't able to verify whether this works - I wasn't even sure who to ask!]



EUROPEAN INSECT PEST ARRIVES IN ARIZONA

Jackie Dillon-Fast
Staff Writer

Gardeners have a new insect pest to worry about this spring. The ash whitefly (*Siphonium phillyreae*) from Europe arrived in Phoenix and Tucson last November by way of California. We should expect to see its appearance in Cochise County in late April.

The gnat-sized ash whitefly infests and seriously damages a variety of landscape trees and ornamentals. In California it has attacked apples, pears, pomegranates, apricots, peaches, citrus, olive, ash, and other shade trees. The whitefly has apparently not affected any native desert plants, but infestations appear to be spreading to more host plants than are normally attacked in its native European range from Ireland to Egypt.

Ash whiteflies can kill full grown trees by repeatedly destroying all of the tree's leaves. Leaves affected by the whitefly turn yellow, curl, and drop prematurely. In addition, whiteflies excrete a sugary honeydew that attracts sooty mold fungi, further damaging the tree. Infestations of flying adult ash whitefly have been compared to a light snow flurry in appearance. They are multivoltine, producing more than one generation per year, and do best at temperatures around 77 degrees.

Experiments in California have shown that common pesticides are completely ineffective against the ash whitefly. However, laboratory experiments with two biological controls indicate that the whitefly's natural European predators may be used successfully in the U.S. to control the insect. Field studies are currently under way using a small parasitic wasp, *Encarsia formosa*, and a ladybird

beetle, *Clitostethus arcuatus*, both imported from Europe. The ladybird beetle has not cleared quarantine yet, but the wasp has recently been released. Serious infestations of ash whitefly generally do not occur in Europe because of the presence of these natural predators. It will take some time to develop a suitable biological control program in the U.S.

Concerned growers can contact Dr. David Byrne, University of Arizona entomologist, for more information.

CUTTINGS 'N' CLIPPINGS

> The Sierra Vista Public Library has pruning videos. Although the videos may not be checked out, they can be viewed at the library.

> A tape showing several ways to propagate plants will be available at the U of A Cooperative Extension Office in Sierra Vista after February 15, 1990. The video may be checked out for home viewing.

> A dormant tree is 40% water; an active growing one is 90%.

> Add another argument for the preservation of native plants: A U of A researcher is analyzing desert plants for naturally occurring compounds to be used in the fight against the AIDS virus. One antiviral agent recently isolated from a non-desert plant may prove to be the next breakthrough in AIDS treatment. Up until now, no studies have been done on antiviral compounds from desert plants. Research will include the analysis of at least 30 varieties native to the Southwest.

NOW IS THE TIME

Carolyn Gruenhagen
Staff

"Now is the time for all good men" No, no, what I should say is, "Now is the time for all good gardeners to be thinking bare-root!" Right now is the best time to be planting bare-root fruit and shade trees, deciduous flowering shrubs, grapes and cane fruit. We all like to save money, and a bare-root plant can save you a considerable amount over the same plant in a container bought a year later. Planting now also allows a strong root system to develop before top growth begins in the spring.

After deciding where to put a new tree or shrub, considering wind and frost patterns, and protections, but before shopping for the bare-root plant, it is recommended that you dig the hole. The hole should be large enough to easily accommodate the roots. Add about 1/3 soil amendments (never manure), and mix well.

Now it is off to the nursery to pick out your bare-root plant. Remember, you get what you pay for. Buy from a reputable dealer, and buy only good quality plants. Be sure the roots are moist, and if you're buying a tree, check to see that the bark is not dry. On a healthy one year old tree, the trunk should be about 1/2 inch in diameter six inches above the bud union.

If you have any doubts about the freshness of the roots, soak them overnight in a bucket of water before planting. Set the plant out according to Figure 1, cutting back broken roots and making sure the bud union is above the soil line. Firm the soil around the roots forming a water basin, and water thoroughly. Do not fertilize now. As difficult as it is to do, prune the tree up to 50% so that it is 3 to 4 feet tall.

Because dormant plants require less water than actively growing ones, water conservatively. If the soil around the plant is damp, do not water. When warm weather returns, water more frequently. And, above all, be patient as some bare-root trees and shrubs are slow to leaf out.

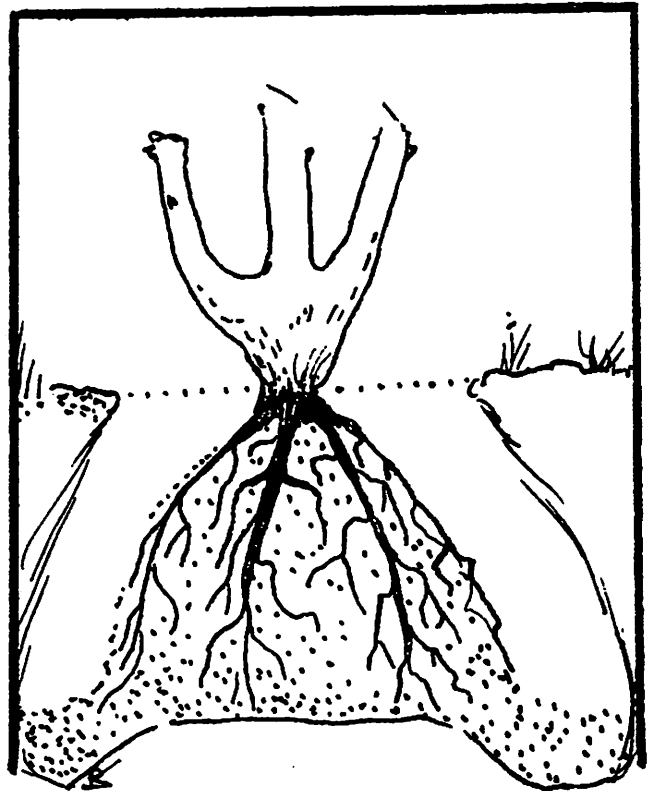


Fig. 1 In a hole large enough to fit roots easily, form a cone of soil. Spread roots evenly over cone. Add soil gradually, firming as added. Form watering basin and water thoroughly.

> About 35 people attended the pruning demonstration on January 20. Nearly 70 were in attendance January 23 at the Oscar Yrun Community Center to listen to Jean Schwennesen's lecture on designing your home landscape.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Merrienne Lange
Staff Writer

Superior: Boyce Thompson Southwest Arboretum (tel 689-2811).

> Feb. 10 - 14: Flower exhibit featuring the Language of Flowers.

> Feb. 17: Cactus & Succulent workshop - 10:00 am

> Feb. 24: Wildflower workshop - 10:00 am

> February:

Every Wednesday: Useful and Edible Desert Plants - 2:00 pm lecture

Every Thursday: Introduction to Succulent Plants - 2:00 pm lecture

Every Saturday: Year Round Color For Desert Gardens Using Drought Tolerant Plants - 2:00 pm lecture

Every Sunday: Wing Memorial Herb Garden - 2:00 pm lecture

Phoenix: Desert Botanical Garden (tel 941-1225), 1201 N. Galvin Parkway.

> Feb. 22: Drip irrigation workshop - 6:30 - 9:00 pm

Green Valley: Green Valley Baptist Church, 1111 N. La Canada Dr., Hours 9:30 - 10:30 am, sponsored by Men's Garden Club of Green Valley and Pima County Extension Office (tel 648-0808).

> Feb. 13: Propagation - Beginning Your Own Grapevines and Native Plants

> Feb. 20: Mini Gardening Seasons

> Feb. 27: Colorful Patios For Attracting Wildlife and Birds

> Mar. 6: Care, Planting and Varieties of Iris

Tucson: Extension Garden Center, 4040 N. Campbell Ave, 9:00 - 10:00 am and Wilmot Library, 530 N. Wilmot Rd, 10:15 - 11:15 am will have the following lectures sponsored by the Pima County Cooperative Extension (tel 628-5628).

> Feb. 7: Vegetables In Containers

> Feb. 14: Dig For Success - How To Do It For Vegetables and Flowers

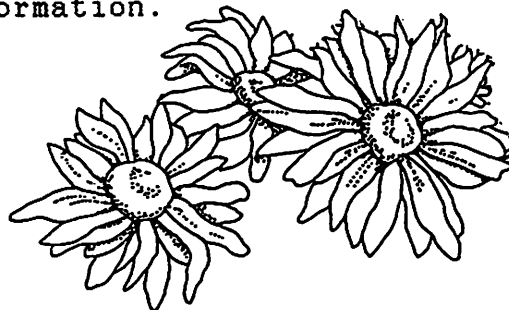
> Feb. 21: What's the Best Citrus To Plant?

> Feb. 28: Prune Your Grapes and Make New Plants From Cuttings

> Mar 7: Winter Weed Clean Up - Summer Weed Prevention

> Fourth annual Xeriscape Conference, "Avoiding the Browning of Tucson - By Design", sponsored by the Southern Arizona Water Resources Assn., February 23, 1990 from 8:00 am - 4:30 pm at Loew's Ventana Canyon Resort, 7000 N. Resort Dr. Registration deadline is February 16. For information, call 881-3939.

There may or may not be a fee for these events. Please call the listed numbers for more information.



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