

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

University of Arizona and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.



the Cochise County Master Gardener

NEWSLETTER

VOL. I, No. 4

MARCH 1990

WHAT TO DO --- WHAT TO DO --- WHAT TO DO --- MARCH

Jackie Dillon-Fast
Staff Writer

> PRUNE ROSES: We advised you to hold off on pruning your rose bushes in February because of the unseasonably mild temperatures intermingled with an occasional bout of legitimate winter weather. Even though there is still a chance for frost, the trend from now on will be toward warmer soil temperatures and an end to whatever dormancy your rose bushes have enjoyed. See our feature article this month, *Pruning Roses*, for tips on pruning for a healthier plant.

> PLANT SEEDS INDOORS: Starting your seeds indoors will give them a headstart on the spring growing season while protecting them from late frosts. It also helps satisfy that powerful urge to get our hands into gardening brought on by warm spring days.

> CHECK CACTUS FOR FUNGUS: Cacti have few natural enemies, but when they strike it is difficult to stop them. One of the worst problems is Black Fungus, affectionately known as "creeping cholla crud". As the name implies, it generally attacks members of the cholla family, spreads easily, and is extremely unattractive. The treatment is to remove all infected parts, as well as any pieces of fungus that have fallen to the ground, and to treat the cactus with sulfur. Unfortunately, by the time the fungus appears on the outside of the cactus, extensive damage has already been done to the internal structures. Keep treating with sulfur and hope for the best, or pull out the entire plant and start over.

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Deborah Young
Deborah Young
Extension Agent,
Agriculture

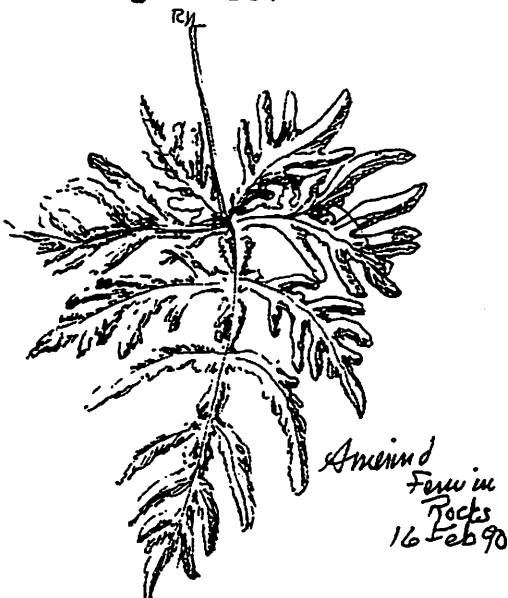
2500 Fry Blvd • Sierra Vista, AZ 85635 • 458-1104

CUTTINGS 'N' CLIPPINGS

> **PLANT COOL SEASON VEGETABLES:** If the urge to plant outdoors is irresistible, go ahead and plant some cool season vegetables such as lettuce, cauliflower, carrots, broccoli, and beets in your garden. Be prepared, however, to give the young plants extra protection on the cold nights that still occur in March and early April.

> **RECONSIDER YOUR WATER USAGE:** Plan ahead to take advantage of the wonderful summer rains to come in July. Examine the water drainage patterns in your landscape. Are there ways you can take advantage of roof runoff? Should you consider a drip irrigation system to get your garden through the hot dry months? Do your trees and shrubs have water basins out to their drip lines for deep watering in May and June? Does rain water run right off your property, away from your plants and into the street? Call or write the Extension Office for information on making maximum use of your water.

> **REMOVE WINTER MULCHES:** Rake off any winter mulches you put around your plants at the end of this month. Be sure to bag or compost it to get rid of any insects that may be overwintering there.



> If your landscape has you wheezing and sneezing, you may want to order a copy of the Allergy Edition of the SAWARA (Southern Arizona Water Resources Association), Low Water Use/Drought Tolerant Plant List. The list rates desert plants according to their allergenic potential - low, moderate, or high. Send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to SAWARA, 48 N. Tucson Blvd., No. 106, Tucson, AZ 85716

> According to an entomologist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service, grasshoppers cost U.S. ranchers, government agencies, and homeowners close to \$400 million annually in lost crops and grasses.

> We can expect to be underwhelmed by the desert wildflower show this spring. The Arizona Sonora Desert Museum experts are expecting a light turn out due to dry weather conditions last fall.

> Get more citrus juice by microwaving whole fruits on high for 15 seconds before juicing.

Editor:
Thomas Christian
Illustrator:
Rose V. Land
Staff:
Jackie Dillon-Fast
Carolyn Gruenhagen
Merrienne Lange

Articles to be published in next month's newsletter must be received at the Sierra Vista Extension Office no later than March 23.

THE REAL WINNER IN THE LANDSCAPE WARS

Jackie Dillon-Fast
Staff Writer

> The war against drugs now has an entomological twist to it. The U.S. administration is considering air-dropping hundreds of millions of malumbia eggs or caterpillars over the cocaine producing regions of Peru and Bolivia. Malumbia is a white moth that is native to these countries and feeds on coca leaves (the source of cocaine) in its caterpillar stage. Although coca growers usually control malumbia with insecticides, researchers believe that a massive invasion of malumbia could result in significant coca crop damage.

HOME GARDENER Q & A COLUMN

Q. I am a newcomer to the Sierra Vista area and would like to know when to plant my vegetable garden.

A. Seeds of cool-season crops such as lettuce, broccoli, cabbage, onions, beets, peas, spinach, carrot, potato, radish, and turnip may be started indoors now (early March). Sow seeds thinly in rows in flats, boxes, pans, or flower pots filled with a sterile seed-starting mix. Cover lightly with a layer of sand or moss. Sprinkle with a fine mist of water, and cover with a sheet of clear plastic film. Place in a reasonably warm room where the flats can get at least six hours of direct sunlight each day. The flat should require no further attention until after the seedlings have developed their first true leaves. They are then ready to transplant to other containers.

For more information, stop by the Sierra Vista Cooperative Extension office and pick up a copy of *Ten Steps to a Successful Vegetable Garden* pamphlet.

An all gravel "lawn" may seem like the ideal landscape to water-conservative Southern Arizona homeowners. In reality, University of Arizona researchers have shown that what a gravel "lawn" saves you in water consumption is quickly spent cooling the air in your sun-baked, over-exposed house.

The researchers compared water consumption and cooling effects of three typical Southern Arizona landscapes: a zeroscape with gravel and no vegetation, a xeriscape with gravel and small trees and shrubs, and an extensive bermuda grass lawn.

They discovered that a zeroscape had the lowest water consumption, but resulted in the highest use of cooling energy inside the home. A bermuda grass lawn had the highest water consumption and the lowest use of cooling energy (it cools principally by evaporation). The initial savings in cooling energy offered by a bermuda grass lawn were quickly lost in higher water costs.

A xeriscape seems to provide the best of both worlds. In addition to having low to moderate water costs, especially with a drip-irrigation system, a xeriscape's trees and shrubs cool by shading as well as by evaporation. In fact, the researchers determined that a well designed xeriscape can affect cooling by as much as 30% without using large amounts of water.

[A University of Arizona Cooperative Extension pamphlet examining the merits of xeriscaping is in the works. We'll let you know when it becomes available.]

PRUNING ROSES

Jackie Dillon-Fast
Staff Writer

We said in last month's newsletter that choosing the right time to prune Arizona roses is difficult. Ideally, they should be pruned two weeks before the buds swell. Some gardeners simply "sense" when this is about to happen. (One St. David gardener judges it by when the mesquite trees begin to bud.)

In odd years, when cold winter weather never really settles in, there are few plants that follow their normal schedules. Two weeks ago my rose bushes began unfolding tender new leaves, apparently confident that spring had truly arrived. It took another burst of winter to convince them otherwise. Fortunately, the plants suffered little frost damage and frost damage is what we were trying to avoid by waiting this long to prune. Remember, pruning a plant that is not fully dormant can stimulate new growth at a time when that growth is still vulnerable to winter damage.

Now that March has arrived, we can begin looking forward to the last frost of the year (usually towards the end of this month, although it varies from year to year). It may not be wise to delay pruning our rose bushes much longer. Aim to have them pruned by the end of the month.

The main goal in pruning roses is to produce a plant with an adequate number of long healthy canes for an abundance of flowers every year. To accomplish this we need to remove dead and diseased wood, thin out weak or crossing canes, head-back the more vigorous canes, and generally create a healthier better balanced plant.

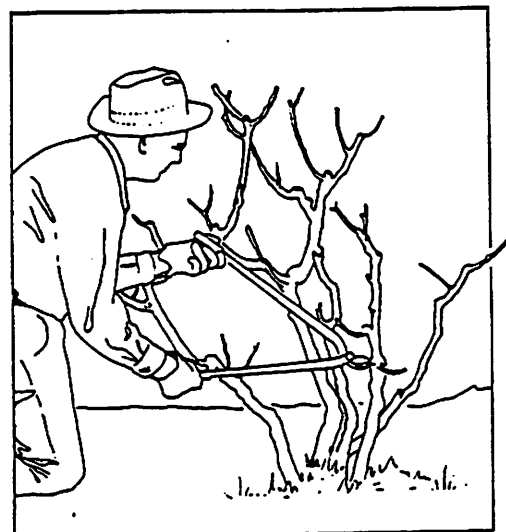


Fig. 1

Severe or heavy pruning (cutting the plant down to three or four canes, 6 - 8 inches high) is not recommended in Southern Arizona because severe pruning exposes too much of the plant to the fierce Arizona sun and often results in short-lived plants. Some rose growers use heavy pruning to produce longer stemmed, show quality roses, but this can be risky unless you are willing to provide your plants with adequate protection.

Moderate or light pruning are better approaches for Southern Arizona rose growers. Moderate pruning thins the plant to five to twelve canes, 18 - 24 inches high (see Figure 1), and results in a larger plant that shades the ground and suffers less from heat injury. Light pruning involves only a minimum of cutting, leaving a plant 3 to 4 feet in height with only the nonproductive canes removed. This results in a profusion of showy, but short stemmed blossoms.

When deciding how to prune your rose plants, keep in mind that all healthy live canes will produce blossoms for 4 to 6 years (or even longer), but with decreasing quality of blossom. If an old, unproductive, or poor quality cane is left in the plant too long, it may be difficult to get new canes to grow up from the base of your plant.

To prune, begin examining the plant for diseased or dead canes. Cut these canes off at the crown, being careful not to leave a stub. If you are removing diseased canes, be certain to keep them away from any healthy canes, and dip your pruning shears in a bleach solution after each cut. Now, step back from your plant and consider its shape. Does it have weak or malformed canes or branches? Is it over-crowded by too many center canes? Would you like it to spread more or spread less? Are there canes that cross one another? Use your answers to these questions to help you decide which of the older canes to remove.

A word of caution: there is a wide difference in the growing habits of rose varieties. In general, rose bushes grow upright, but each rose variety will have different growing tendencies. Some varieties may produce longer canes and have a wider spread, and others are more compact with smaller canes. Floribundas are an example of this latter type. As in pruning trees, it is important to prune with your plant's natural shape rather than against it.

Check the new growth coming up from the base of your plant. Look for tall, slender, light green "canes" growing straight up from below the bud union. These are called suckers. They will not produce blossoms and should be removed as soon as they appear.

After removing the desired number of older or weaker canes, you will need to prune the top portion of your plant, referred to "header" cuts in tree pruning. If the top growth is allowed to become too thick, there will be little, if any, growth of new canes from the base of the plant.

As a rule, cut back new growth of canes by one-third, saving a few well spaced side branches as well. Make your cut within one-fourth inch of a bud or side branch and on a slight angle opposite the bud, with the bud on the high side (see Figure 2). If you want a plant with a wider spread, cut right above a bud or side branch that faces out. To reduce spread, cut right above a bud or side branch that faces in toward the plant's center. Remove last season's leaves from any of the remaining canes.

Immediately after pruning, you should seal all cut surfaces larger than a pencil with a sealing compound having an asphalt base. This will protect the fresh wood from infestation by borers.

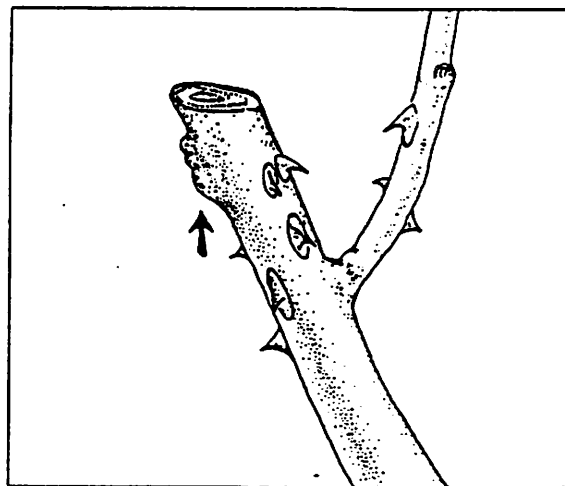


Fig. 2

[The Cooperative Extension has a pamphlet on "Roses for Arizona". Contact the Sierra Vista or Willcox office for a copy.]

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Merrienne Lange
Staff Writer

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

Every Wednesday: Flowering
Shrubs For Desert Landscape -
2:00 pm lecture

Every Thursday: History of
Boyce Thompson SW Arboretum -
2:00 pm lecture

Every Saturday: Desert
Wildflowers - 2:00 pm lecture

Every Sunday: Look at the
Cactus Family - 2:00 pm lecture

April 7 - 15: Arid Land
Plant Show

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

March 1 - April 30: For
recorded information (updated on
Fridays) on wildflowers blooming
throughout the state call Desert
Botanical Garden's wildflower
hotline at (602) 941-2867

March 19: Identifying
Wildflowers - 1:00 - 3:00 pm
workshop

March 24 & 25: Spring plant
sale - 9:00 - 5:00 pm

March 29: Landscaping Around
Pools - 6:30 - 9:30 pm workshop

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

March 13: Watering from A to
Z (except drip) - a panel
discussion

March 20: Drip Systems -
Who, What, Where, When and Why

March 27: Closing Up Your
Home For the Summer - Leaving
With A clear Conscience

April 3: Trends in
Agriculture and Horticulture

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).

March 7: Winter Weed
Cleanup, Summer Weed Prevention

March 14: Get the Drip
System Assembled and Working

March 21: A New Year For
Hydroponics - "Inside and Out"

March 28: You've Got to Thin
the Crowding Fruits

Sierra Vista: Brown Bag
Seminars at the Sierra Vista
Public Library, 2950 E. Tacoma,
sponsored by Cochise County
Cooperative Extension, Noon -
1:00 pm (Sierra Vista tel
458-1104 or Willcox tel
384-3594).

March 12: Preparing Your
Garden Site and Soil - Deborah
Young

March 19: Fruit Tree Care -
Deborah Young

March 26: Vegetable
Gardening - Deborah Young

April 9: Lawn Grasses - Bill
Free

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

