**“Care of Fruits in the Landscape”**

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All of the fruit trees should have been pruned by now, and most should be nearly finished with their blooms.

The fruit tree pesticides spray program is usually linked to the bloom period. When half the petals have fallen, it is time to begin spraying for insects and fungus on peaches, plums and apples. The traditional spray program includes spraying carbaryl or malathion for insects and captan for fungus.

The two chemicals can be mixed together and sprayed by following the instructions on the label. They should be sprayed every week or 10 days if the fruit is going to be protected through harvest. Review the label to ensure that the material is appropriate for your fruit and situation.

It is difficult to produce blemish-free fruit with an organic spray program, but a combination of Spinosad and a sulfur product may work. Neem oil also has some fungal preventive properties. Look for a fruit and vegetable spray with organic active ingredients including neem oil.

The fruit trees should have also been fertilized this spring. If you didn’t do the job in February, fertilize now. Apply 1 cup of slow release or winterizer lawn fertilizer per 1 inch of trunk diameter.

The slow release lawn fertilizer formula is usually 19-5-9. A common winterizer formula is 18-6-12. The most active part of the root system is under the drip line of the tree. That is where the fertilizer should be spread.

If you are lucky and your trees produce an excess amount of fruit, you may want to thin the trees. An ideal amount of fruit is about one plum, apple or peach every 6-8 inches on the trees. With 6-8 inches between each fruit, you can expect large fruit and minimal branch breakage. Do not wait very long to thin fruit. It is best to do it when the fruit is dime size.

Birds do some damage to fruit until all are harvested. Sharing is one option, and bird-netting is another option to discourage birds. The only sure-fire way to protect the fruit from squirrels is to trap the culprits.

Citrus will be a mixed bag this year. Most satsumas and grapefruit seemed to have escaped damage from the cold, but lemons and limes were defoliated with some stem damage.

Wait until you get a clear picture of what is dead and what is alive before you prune. Go ahead and fertilize at the same rate as the other tree fruits. For citrus in containers, use Osmocote or another slow release fertilizer designed for containers.

If you were able to spray with dormant oil, the scale insects should be under control. Citrus also benefits from fruit thinning. Reducing the load to a reasonable level also contributes to a diminished inclination towards alternate bearing. Trees that mature a reasonable amount of fruit are more likely to have fruit each year.

Citrus trees that were defoliated due to freeze damage will not produce fruit this year. Encourage them to replace frozen stems with fertilization and adequate water.

A unique and growing issue on citrus is the pecking of fruit by young grackles that results in mature fruit having black scarring. The pecks do not usually penetrate the fruit but the scarring is ugly. So far, researchers have not figured out why the birds peck the developing fruit and how to prevent it. Until the mystery is solved, use the scarred fruit for juice or for distribution to your least favorite friends.