

Helpful reminders of what's needed to grow healthy, productive trees and plants.

SEPTEMBER 24, 2017

2017 Healthy Growing Reminder #5 – FALL CLEAN-UP

1) Replace your tree guards for the Winter. Always use white guards. One of the primary functions of the guards is to prevent winter injury (frost cracking/sun scald) and white does this much better than clear or black.

We highly recommend the spiral type guards with holes. Our second choice would be the vertically corrugated guards with a black backing. We do not recommend the horizontally corrugated guards. They hold more moisture and have been known to have mice build nests inside. The mice then eat the tree bark over the winter, which can kill the tree.



2) Clean-up all windfall, leaves, and remove any dead or mummified fruit still hanging on the tree. Many pathogens and destructive insects overwinter on, or in, left over fruit and fallen leaves.

All fruit should be disposed of in the trash, fed to the deer or livestock. Composting or burying may also work, but if not done properly, many of the pathogens/insects will survive so we don't really recommend it. This is one of the times the hornets and yellow jackets can be your ally and is one of the reasons we suggest you don't try to kill them off in the summer. They can pick up a whole lot of deadfall for you this time of year.

Leaves and branches should also be picked up, burnt or thrown in the trash. Many of the pathogens that would require spraying next year can be controlled or eliminated if the leaves are disposed of now.

3) Add a layer of mulch for winter protection. Add 4-5 inches of chips, bark, or straw in at least a 4-foot diameter.

Roots can start to die at as high as 26° F and an extra layer of mulch really helps to insulate the soil, especially if we don't get enough snow before it gets really cold. Typically, I like to wait until the ground is starting to freeze and the trees are really dormant. Don't pile it up against the trunk and be prepared to remove the extra mulch in the spring.

4) Fence at-risk trees. We recommend a 4-foot high, 4-foot diameter fence around your young trees.

First, is for rabbit protection. The tree guards will help if we don't get much snow, but come March if we have a couple of feet of snow on the ground, the rabbits will be looking for something to eat and the thin sweet bark of fruit trees is a favorite. Normally if this happens they will girdle the tree.

Second, is for deer protection. Deer will browse the branch tips, which will greatly stunt the growth of your trees. Deer can also cause substantial damage by "rubbing" in the Fall.

5) Be wary of late autumn drought. It doesn't look likely this year, but if the soil dries out before freeze, a little extra water will help the trees over-Winter better.