

Archive for May, 2009

Staking And Trunk Wrapping

Saturday, May 2nd, 2009

When planting larger trees, many folks believe that they should be staked and guyed in order to stabilize the newly planted specimen. In addition, trees sometimes come from the garden center or nursery with the trunks wrapped in “protective” material. Whether a tree is balled and burlapped or potted, it is seldom necessary to stake or wrap the stem.

Research indicates that trunk wraps provide little, if any, benefit to newly planted trees. In fact, they may actually do more harm than good by encouraging attacks from harmful insects and disease-causing fungi. Avoid using trunk wraps unless specifically recommended by a tree care professional.

Stakes may be used to prevent shifting of the root ball (in a windy location) or to protect the stem from mowing equipment. If needed, the tree should be guyed strongly enough to provide support, but flexible enough to allow 6 to 8 inches of sway. Drive one or two stakes (better) near the tree but not through the roots. The best guying materials are wide and flexible, such as plastic horticultural tape or canvas webbing. If guy wires are used, place them through rubber or plastic tubing, or rubber garden hose sections, to prevent damage to the tree trunk. All guys/ties should be placed low on the trunk (about 6 inches above the point that stabilizes the stem – let the top sway; it helps the root system get accustomed to the winds as they begin their growth). Remove the guys/ties as soon as the tree can stand alone; about three months, but no longer than a year after planting.

Better yet: **Don't stake at all if the newly planted tree can stand upright on its own with no drooping of the main stem.**

Tool Care

Saturday, May 9th, 2009

Most of us have probably finished with planting for the spring. Now is the time to “let the trees grow!” About all you need to do for a while is to make sure the newly planted trees are properly watered and protected from damage by weed whips and lawnmowers. You can put up the planting tools for now.

Proper care of good tools such as shovels, pruning saws and shears, dibbles, planting bars, tiling spades, sharpshooters, trowels, etc. will go a long way to assure that these equipment items are handy and ready for the next project, but that they will also last for years saving you money in the long run. Dirt and mud need to be washed off, and any rusty spots need to be removed from metal surfaces with a wire brush. Lightly oil, or spray with WD-40 (or similar protectants), and hang them in a storage area so air can circulate around them; and where they are also out of the way. Don't just stand them on the concrete floor of a garage or basement. Make sure they are protected from the weather. And, for goodness sakes, don't let them lay around wherever you store them.

Another good idea is to sharpen any edges that need it before storing the tool. That way, it won't have to be done the next time you are in a hurry to get a job done. Additionally, replace any screws, bolts, nuts, etc. that have been lost or worn through, so that this chore won't have to be done before the next job can be started.

Lastly, make sure that all wooden parts of your tools are cleaned and dried thoroughly, before storing them. Needless to say, but check for cracks in handles (or broken handles), and replace right away, if the wood is in danger of breaking and/or splintering. If a handle shows excessive wear or weathering, rub in some dusting wax, or (for really bad spots), rub in some linseed oil to rejuvenate the wood.

Good tools, well maintained, can make a tree care job not only easy to do, but pleasant as well.

Virginia Juniper a.k.a. Eastern Redcedar

Saturday, May 16th, 2009

Eastern redcedar (*Juniperus virginiana* L.) never seems to be thought of very often when folks are looking for an evergreen tree to plant in urban/suburban settings. Even foresters, arborists, landscape architects, et. al. seem to cringe whenever someone like me says' "Why not redcedar?" Sure, it is sometimes recommended for block plantings to make a screen or windbreak, or to control soil erosion, but it is seldom recommended as a stand-alone tree in a yard. And that's too bad.

Redcedar is actually **not a cedar!** As the scientific name indicates, **it is a juniper**, and an upright juniper at that. Perhaps we should promote it as Virginia juniper. That would be a more accurate common name, and may not carry the stigma of many folk's ideas that redcedar is a weed; as it is characterized throughout much of rural Missouri.

Redcedar has many redeeming qualities that make it a good evergreen for urban plantings. It is a very tough plant, and will grow almost anywhere; in good soil and bad, in hot places, near streets where bad things are spread that attack trees, or even in the front yards of new homes where we all know the very best fill dirt is placed by the builders. Right.....

Like any tree, redcedar does have some characteristics that make it unsuitable for some locales. It is an alternate host for the cedar apple rust disease, and, although the pathogen doesn't affect the cedars very much, the disease can spread to nearby apple trees (including crabapples) and sometimes severely impact their growth and development. Groups of large redcedars sometimes attract large flocks of migrating birds, and their droppings (even during a simple overnight stay) can cause much consternation for homeowners, especially if they have something outside that doesn't need to be "dropped" on. Overall, however, the advantages of this species far outweigh the negatives, at least in the opinion of this aging Virginia juniper champion.

I have several large redcedars lining my backyard boundary. They were left there when the home was built in an old field that was grown up with the species. I wouldn't trade them for anything else in that location. They screen me from my neighbors to the east (townhomes), and provide resting and nesting places for the birds we like to watch. I'm on a fairly dry site (unless I water), and they can handle the conditions better than anything else I can think of right now. One is approaching 18" in diameter, and the smallest (of nine total) is about 8" in diameter. My redcedars are in a line running from southeast to northwest across the backside of my lot. Great for breaking the wind? You bet! Good for a long period of morning shade in the summer too.

Virginia junipers> I love em!



Fruit Trees As Landscape Trees ?

Saturday, May 23rd, 2009

We foresters, and arborists to some extent, never seem to think in terms of using fruit trees as part of a home landscaping plan. However, it isn't entirely our fault, since many homeowners seldom ask about fruit trees when they are seeking advice about what kind of trees to plant around their places. Perhaps both groups need to be reminded that a home fruit orchard can be a delight to the eye as well as the palate. Many standard varieties of apples, pears, peaches, apricots, plums, and cherries are also good shade trees, if planted in the right place. Dwarf trees that produce full-sized fruit can be used in smaller spaces. Most fruit trees can be just as lovely as flowering trees and large shrubs. They blossom too, and the fruit crop gives the color of a second blooming all summer; plus a great tasting come harvest time in the fall.

Fruit trees are either self-pollinating or self-sterile. Self-sterile trees require pollen from another cultivar of the same species for fertilization to occur. They need a compatible cultivar growing within 100 feet, preferably closer. Without this cross pollination of the flowers, self-sterile varieties will not bear fruit,

even though they may blossom abundantly. Check individual fruit tree descriptions for pollination information.

Plant fruit trees to allow sun and space for their mature size. Most standard sized fruit trees will mature at 20 – 35 feet in height, and will need a growing space anywhere from 20 x 20 feet to 35 x 35 feet. Again, check spacing requirements for the type of tree to be planted. Dwarf varieties will mature at about 8 – 15 feet in height and need spaces from 10 x 10 feet to 15 x 15 feet. Most commercially grown varieties will come with the spacing recommendations, along with other pertinent information about the tree.

Homeowners with larger lots might find it very rewarding to establish an orchard using favored fruit producers. A home grown apple or peach, for example, tastes mighty good when plucked from ones own tree. There are also other ways to grow fruit trees around the homestead, if a larger growing space is lacking wherein to plant on a grid. My mouth is already watering for a nice juicy pear, apple, or peach; or apricot (I love em); or cherry; or plum; or.....

Fruit trees can also be used in ways other than the traditional orchard planted on a grid:



As a privacy screen



At corners of your house



As a circular orchard

Note: Be sure to plant dwarf trees with the graft-union above the ground, otherwise the dwarfing rootstock will be cancelled out.

Pest Control

Saturday, May 30th, 2009

One of the first management actions facing a homeowner, who has some newly-planted trees, is controlling forces that seem intent on destroying the young tree(s) you've so patiently nurtured into the growing season. The forces most often encountered are mechanical damage, insect and disease attacks, and the weather. Dealing with each of these forces can sometimes perplex a tree owner to a point that they just throw up their hands and "let nature take its course." If the right tree is planted in the right place (always recommended), this may be a prudent course, if one can stand to see the tree laboring to overcome the attack(s) that occur. The right tree in the right place usually perseveres, and flourishes, over the long haul. However, what can be done, in the near term to help a tree along, while lessening the anguish of watching your "baby" suffer.....needlessly, in your view.

Mechanical Damage – is the easiest factor to deal with: **DON'T MOW IT DOWN OR WEED WHIP IT TO DEATH!** Mechanical damage is always caused by the acts of people, not machines. Machines are inanimate objects that don't think, or act, on their own. It is the hand that guides them that's responsible for any damage they do. Mulch around the stem and don't cross the mulch ring with the mower or weed whip string. This will solve almost all the problems of mechanical damage to any tree, plus one gets the added benefits of the mulch; which, of course, is one of your tree's best friends. More stringent measures may be needed if mechanical damage might be expected from sources not under your direct control; e.g. a vehicle out of control runs into your yard and crushes your tree, or unruly neighborhood kids break the tree playing touch football on your lawn. Individual situations require individual solutions, and are too numerous to be covered here.

Insect and Disease Attacks – are sometimes easy to deal with and sometimes difficult, or impossible, to foil. If you see "bugs" chomping on leaves, the first impulse is to spray them with an insecticide. However, it is important to spray them with the "right" insecticide. The average homeowner is usually unfamiliar with what insect they are encountering, and even less familiar with what insecticide is "right" for the job. The best course of action is to carefully collect a few of the insects, along with a small sample of the damaged material (leaf, twig, flowers, etc.), and take it to the nearest certified nurseryman or arborist. They can usually identify the pest and prescribe the proper chemical to deal with the organism; thus minimizing "collateral damage" to other insects (such as ladybugs) that may actually be helpful in your landscape.

The same advice goes for treating diseases. One must first make a correct diagnosis of the problem before corrective measures can be taken that target only the offensive pest. Again, contacting a certified nurseryman, or arborist, is the best course of action, unless you just want to "let nature take its course." Many of the "right" trees can overcome, or grow well, in spite of insect or disease outbreaks, over the long run.....but not every one can.
So.....help them out when necessary.

Lastly, until we can control the weather, there is little we can do about the damage caused by wind, ice, etc. except to clean up afterward, and do as much corrective pruning as possible. I've previously talked about dealing with storm damage, and homeowners can usually handle many of the problems encountered on their own; particularly if young, or newly-planted trees are affected. Older (larger) trees may need treatment by a certified arborist, if they can be saved at all.

For a tree to become a valuable asset, plant the right tree in the right place, and give it the care it needs along the way (proper pruning, mulching, and protection from damaging forces). You'll be glad you did.