

Meetings and Announcements

UCCE Kern County Office Situation--UCCE is still working!

Yes, the usual: Our office on Mt. Vernon Ave. is currently open to the public. **In accordance with the public health emergency declared by the County of Kern, all visitors are required to wear face coverings in all public places until further notice.** Many of us advisors will be alternately in the office and working from home, and I have answered many questions via email, and new queries come in regularly from Kern residents as well as from those who live much further away. Email is the best way to reach me, my address is jfkarlik@ucanr.edu.

Weekly Zoom presentation on gardens and design has resumed: Wisley RHS Garden is the next topic

In January I continued making weekly Zoom presentations on gardens and landscape design, augmented with a bit of history. These presentations are Thursdays at 4:30 pm, and are mostly based on photos from our past horticultural tours. The next presentation, Feb 25, will be a visit to Wisley Garden, the flagship garden of Britain's Royal Horticultural Society. The meeting ID and password remain the same. If you didn't receive, please send me an email, jfkarlik@ucanr.edu, and I'll send you the Zoom connection info.

39th Annual Landscape Management Seminar

At this point we've put on hold our 39th annual landscape management seminar, which would normally be held in February. We want to offer eight hours of PCA credit and allow attendees to meet in person. Right now, we can't do those things. Perhaps we can schedule for later in the spring.

Horticultural Study Tour XI: Wales, Edinburgh, Northern Scotland

As you know, we've had to cancel Hort Tour XI due to Covid. We had hoped we might reschedule for 2021, but that seems infeasible. Accordingly, and so we might see spring bloom, we are looking at spring 2022 for this tour. It will be retitled Horticulture Study Tour XII, and we plan to offer essentially the same itinerary listed for Hort Tour XI.

Return to Chernobyl...when?

Likewise, we had to cancel our planned 2020 return to Chernobyl. We know there are interested people who would like to visit. Perhaps we can return in 2022.

Planting and Early Care of Deciduous Fruit Trees

February and March are good times to plant bare-root deciduous fruit trees. When selecting fruit trees, be sure to obtain a variety suitable for your location. The widest selection is often found in early spring when bare-root trees become available, and bare-root fruit trees are preferable to container stock. One advantage is cost, another is that we can see the root system and therefore choose a tree with good root geometry (not twisted or narrow) and without damaged or diseased roots.

Attention to variety selection may also reduce some pest problems. For example, mid-season peaches mature during the annual green fruit beetle flight, whereas later- or earlier-maturing varieties avoid this insect. If cross pollination from another variety is necessary for fruit set, such as for sweet cherries, be sure to get a compatible pollinator, or use a two-in-one or three-in-one grafted tree. It's a good idea to label varieties so that if a tree dies it can be replaced. Similarly, labeling branches of grafted trees may prevent an inadvertent pruning cut which completely removes the pollinating limb. Nemaguard rootstock is preferred for stone fruits where nematodes may be a problem, which is most locations in Kern County. For apple trees, rootstocks of the MM series give varying degrees of dwarfing. For helping in variety selection, a publication, *Deciduous Fruit for the Home*, is available at the UC Cooperative Extension Office, 1031 S. Mt. Vernon Avenue, Bakersfield.

When planting, choose a location that will receive plenty of sunlight and, if possible, will be protected from wind. Allow plenty of space for the mature trees. For full-size trees, 20 feet is a typical spacing.

Soil amendments in the planting hole are generally not necessary, and may prove deleterious. It's best to settle the soil with water rather than tamping the soil. Whitewash, or white latex paint diluted 1:1 with water, is recommended for the trunks of young trees to prevent sunburn.

There are three pruning phases in the life of a deciduous fruit tree. The first occurs at planting, when the first cut should be made to foster development of a vase-shaped structure, since an open-center form is preferred for almost all deciduous fruit species on the San Joaquin Valley floor. After a bareroot tree is planted, the trunk should be headed about knee high, or 24-32 inches above the soil surface. This cut may be emotionally difficult to make, because it may seem \$15 of a \$20 tree has been thrown away. In reality, this most-important cut serves to establish low orientation points of structural branches (a low "head"), which will allow most pruning, harvesting, and pest management to be performed without a ladder during the life of the tree. When we purchase a tree at the nursery, we are paying for a well-developed root system and the top (scion) variety. The upper structure of the tree may be pretty, but should be removed upon planting. Trees in agricultural fields need higher heads for equipment passage, but at home a low head greatly facilitates tree care.

A Note About Shade Trees

February and March are also good times to plant bare-root deciduous shade trees. Again, it is possible to see the root system, and there should be cost savings over container stock. However, we do not prune (cut back, head) a shade tree at planting. We want the central leader intact.

John Karlik
Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science

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