

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 02-26-03) , ©2005

An important event I forgot to mention last week is the Peninsula Fruit Club “Grafting Show” on Saturday March 8 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Kitsap County Fairgrounds across the road from the Pavilion at the Thunderbird Room, downstairs in the Eagle’s Nest Catering Building. Admission is free. Rootstock (apple, plum and pear) and dozens of varieties of scion wood are available for a nominal fee of two dollars for rootstock and one dollar for scion wood. For information call 360-697-2783 evenings and weekends before 9 p.m.

While we’re on the subject of fruit trees if you’ve determined it’s necessary to apply a delayed dormant oil spray to your fruit trees before bud break this year, Dr. Art Antonelli of WSU Puyallup Research and Diagnostic Center, says so far no research-based information exists about a spray to destroy the tent caterpillar egg cases. However, he’s been hearing from growers that delayed dormant oil sprays applied according to label directions and at the correct time of year have been showing results in smothering the tent caterpillar egg cases. Dr. Antonelli says use a spray with the numbers between 92 percent and higher. This method might be worth exploring.

Questions about the caterpillar egg cases have been coming in to the WSU Kitsap Extension Office lately. If you’ve been removing the egg casings and dropping them on the lawn or ground you probably don’t need to worry about the larvae hatching out and crawling up the tree trunks. The caterpillars are small when hatching out and need to be adjacent to their food source for instant eating and growing. The open casings have left the eggs exposed during the winter and the larvae perish. Of course for extra measure you could probably run your lawnmower over them a few times. (Just kidding.)

WSU King/Pierce County Extension Agent Mary Robson says the following about dormant sprays:

“Neither the spray nor the applicator is dormant in a “dormant spray,” the plants to which it’s applied are [what’s dormant]. The term refers to winter-applied sprays for insect pests and diseases, put on before foliage begins to leaf out.

To use dormant sprays, first identify the reason for the spraying. They are often used on fruit trees to control over-wintering insect pests such as scale and aphids. (The aphids over-winter as eggs, and the spray smothers the eggs, preventing spring hatching.) A dormant spray isn’t an all-purpose winter splashing of pesticide around the garden: it’s a specific spray chosen for a specific pest. The dormant spray used on fruit trees is often horticultural oil (sold as superior-type oil), and it may be mixed with lime-sulfur depending on the pest to be controlled. It’s sprayed thoroughly to give good coverage on the trunk, branches, small limbs and shoots.”

If your trees have started to leaf out already you won’t want to use a delayed dormant oil spray. Remember also, “the label is the law.” Always follow label directions.

A good site for information on pesticides is the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides at www.pesticide.org. This site has abundant information about pesticides. You can also search the site for chemicals by their name and be able to read the labels without a magnifying glass. I recommend this site for use as a research tool.

I'll close today with this tidbit. If you're a fan of Sunset Western Gardening publications a new book called "Gardening in the Northwest" is hot off the presses. Every page is covered with enticing photographs and gardening tips, plus many of our local luminaries are featured within the pages. You can catch glimpses into the world of Ciscoe Morris, Dan Hinkley, Steve Lorton and Val Easton. One of the gardens featured is lovingly owned and tended by Bobbie Garthwaite and Joe Sullivan of Bainbridge Island. The book is one to treasure and dream through while waiting for sunnier days.

Here's one of my favorite paragraphs from the book: "As Lorton says, 'I once complained that there was nothing worse than slugs. God was listening, I know, and sent me wild blackberries.' But no matter the challenges, he feels a deep and abiding love for his country garden. 'It makes me hope for reincarnation. I want to come back, several times at least, as a bird to nest in my favorite tree.'"

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