



by Kevin Marini, UCCE Placer/Nevada

1. What is the best time to spray for insects/worms on a Granny Smith apple tree?

a. Right now! A dormant spray of horticultural oil can be applied to smother those overwintering critters on your tree. Of course, monitor pests during growing season to determine if more treatment is necessary for active infestations. Codling moths (the caterpillar in the apple) can be very challenging to control and necessitate more than just a dormant spray – see here - <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7412.html>

2. How to keep rats from eating and stripping the bark off the branches of lemon tree?

a. Rats can be serious pests of our fruit trees and vegetable gardens. Controlling them is challenging so all methods should be considered - <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74106.html>

3. What fruit trees are safe to have around goats?

a. I don't believe any fruit tree would be 100% safe around goats. The use of physical barriers around the trees would be absolutely necessary to keep them from damaging the trees even if the fruit on the tree is beyond their reach.

4. What is the best insecticide to use on apple trees and when?

a. There are dormant sprays (Hort oil) to be used when the trees are leafless and dormant for prevention of insect pests. There are also a myriad of options depending on the insect pest during the growing season. There is no "best one" overall as it depends on the insect and the level of infestation. When you notice an insect, the best thing to do is properly identify it before taking any action. This will dictate the insecticide used if needed.

5. How do you protect cherries from birds?

a. Keeping the cherry tree small through dormant and summer pruning is essential to allow the easy use of bird netting to keep birds away from fruit. There are also a bunch of “repellents” on the market that are discussed here - <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn74152.html>

6. What works best to kill cottony cushion scale?

a. It is super important to understand the life cycle of these scale to ensure the most effective control. UC IPM states that, in most cases, beneficial insects (aka “natural enemies”) are very effective in controlling the populations of these scale so patience may be warranted at first detection. More detailed info here - <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/PMG/PESTNOTES/pn7410.html>

7. When is the best time to spray for Peach Leaf Curl?

a. Right now is the time to use a dormant spray to prevent infection come spring. Using a copper-based fungicide is recommended. You cannot rid the tree of the infection once you notice it in the spring. If dead leaves are still present on the dormant tree, try and shake the tree to get them off or just spray around them adequately. More info here: <http://ipm.ucanr.edu/QT/peachleafcurlcard.html>

8. My citrus trees have curled leaves – what should I do?

a. The first thing is to identify if there is an insect pest causing the problem by examining the leaves. Aphids, for example, as sucking insects can cause leaves to curl. Leaf cupping (leaf curling inward) can be a sign of overwatering and/or heat stress. Leaf curling downward usually is not a cause of concern if new growth is normal.

9. When is the best time to fertilize citrus in a container? In the ground?

a. In general, February/March is a good time to apply a slow-release complete fertilizer to citrus trees in containers. You do not want to apply a fast-acting high Nitrogen fertilizer at this time due to the fact that rains may just leach it out. A later application of just N may be necessary. For in ground plantings, top dressing an inch or two of compost can be done from fall-spring. For container grown trees, depending on the size of the container and how much the container mix has “shrunk or settled” over time, it may be necessary to repot with new potting mix after years of growing.

10. I have heard that it isn’t a good practice to mix nursery bought bagged soil products into native soils. Is this correct?

a. Yes, it is. “Soil” refers to your native soil with a mineral base and everything you would buy bagged at a nursery really isn’t “soil” at all (there are few exceptions). The only things to add to your native soil are nutritive amendments based on a soil analysis and/or high quality compost (if your organic matter % on soil analysis is low). The idea

of improving native soil by adding bagged “soils” or “conditioners” usually causes more harm than good.

11. My fruit trees get suckers and when I cut them off, they always grow back. What can be done?

a. In general, many refer to “suckers” as vigorous shoots that come from the ground around the trunk, likely from the rootstock. These will constantly push up and need to be pruned off. “Watersprouts” is the term used for the upright, vigorous shoots coming from branches and trunks of trees. These too can be pruned out but sometimes can be used to regenerate a part of a tree where new wood or future fruit bearing spurs are needed.

12. Various pruning questions – when, how much to prune, citrus/avocado skirt pruning?

a. It is generally recommended to never prune more than 1/3 of the tree in a given season; therefore, bringing a large fruit tree down to size may take years of gradually making it smaller. Heavy pruning can stimulate growth so expect a bunch of vigorous shoots to grow after removing large amounts of wood which may have to be summer pruned off. Dormant season pruning (when deciduous trees have lost their leaves and buds haven’t swelled up yet) is done roughly Nov-Feb depending on location and is a good time to prune for structure. Although citrus trees don’t lose their leaves, the winter time is also a good time to do some minor pruning as well (citrus trees don’t require a lot of heavy pruning unless you’re trying to make smaller). Skirt pruning of citrus (and avocado) is a good idea to keep branches from touching the ground and allow air flow through the tree.

13. I have a lemon tree in a container; should I transplant into the ground or leave it?

a. It’s really your choice and your situation that would dictate as citrus can be grown in either a large (wider than deeper) container or in the ground. Now through spring would be a good time to transplant if you desire to do so. If the tree has been in the container for a long time, you may have to wash off all the container media (potting mix) and make sure the root structure isn’t compromised prior to planting in the ground.

14. How do I grow a tree from cuttings? When should I start?

a. In general, most fruit tree types are grafted onto rootstocks to help them thrive and ward off pests. You absolutely can take a cutting and root it but you’ll lose out on the benefit of a rootstock unless you graft the cutting onto one. There are two types of cuttings – hardwood and softwood, so, depending on the type of fruit tree you’re looking to propagate, you want to research what the best cutting is for that type. For example, figs root very easily by taking hardwood cuttings (now) vs. a peach that you’d want to wait to get a nice softwood shoot cutting in a few months.

15. A friend has an amazing lemon tree nearby, can I use the seeds to grow one at my house?

a. You can plant the seeds and grow a lemon tree from them but genetically, the tree will differ from the amazing one nearby. It may be better, worse, or roughly similar – we simply don't know. If you wanted an exact copy of the amazing lemon tree, you'd want to take a cutting of it and root and grow that.

16. Do dwarf plum trees grow in Roseville? What pests do they get?

a. Yes plum trees can grow in Roseville and the majority of the varieties come in "SemiDwarf" types which doesn't necessarily keep them super small like a "Genetic Dwarf" type would. This means you'll still have to do a fair share of pruning, both dormant and summer. Insect pests that are common on plum trees around here are aphids, scale, and whatever caterpillar is having a population boom this year. We do recommend a dormant oil treatment on plums. They also are prone to bacterial cankers if bark is sunburned and cracked so do protect with whitewashing. Thinning the fruit early on increases size and quality.

17. My dwarf citrus trees were planted in 2019 and bore fruit and then in 2020 there were no flowers and no fruit at all. What is best explanation for no flowers, no fruit, or even dropped flowers or dropped fruit?

a. There are a large number of possible reasons for any fruit tree to not flower and/or bear fruit – some are related to natural conditions of weather, pests, and fruit tree type, while others are due to the gardener him/herself (overwatering, overfertilization). I would need to ask you a bunch of questions to properly get a lead on one of the above reasons and then explore if that is actually the cause. One common issue in the foothills is cold weather at a crucial time in the fruit trees' flowering or fruit development. Watering properly is another big factor, especially when the fruit trees are linked to an irrigation controller and on a station for a situation like turfgrass!

18. Are there any types of apple trees that can produce fruit from only one tree?

a. Yes, there are a few apple varieties that are sold as "self-pollinated" or "self-fruitful" such as "Golden Delicious"; however, all apple trees will likely set heavier fruit loads with a cross-pollinating variety planted along with them.

19. How many times a year should a Meyer lemon bush on a trellis produce lemons?

a. The typical Meyer lemon bush/tree in the perfect spot, treated right, will flower and bear fruit throughout the year. There may be more production at certain times a year and it can take a while for fruit to fully ripen. Here is a good article from our fellow Master Gardeners in Sonoma Co -

http://sonomamg.ucanr.edu/Plant_of_the_Month/Meyer_Lemon/

20. Can you provide contact information for the “small tree guru” you mentioned?

a. I cannot provide his personal contact information but his name is Ed Laivo and he is well known in the fruit tree industry (worked for Dave Wilson for years) and has great videos on youtube if you search for him.

21. How can a home gardener tell which fruit tree care treatments are detrimental to the wider ecosystem?

a. This is a great question and I’m very happy you asked it! Our UC IPM website has a ton of information on this topic as their goal is responsible and appropriate pesticide use to avoid negative environmental impacts. This page - http://ipm.ucanr.edu/GENERAL/pesticides_urban.html - has information in general on the topic but also has a database of active ingredients in pesticides and their environmental impacts. It’s a wonderful resource for home gardeners!

22. Do you have to whitewash after the tree has been planted and established?

a. Yes, it is recommended to continue whitewashing until the tree has established scaffold branching and thick bark that will protect the trunk from sunburn – probably a good 2-3 seasons. But, even when mature with good branching, there may be times when pruning opens up the tree to more sunshine on certain branches that will need to be whitewashed at that time.

23. Is there something that I can do to promote fruit(ing)?

a. There are a number of actions a home gardener can take to ensure the fruit tree (or in this case, this question was related to grapevines) has what it needs to make fruit. Of course, as I mentioned above, there are things that are out of our control as well that can cause fruit to not form. If we assume the planting was done correctly and a soil analysis was done to make sure nutrients are in the soil, it comes down to “cultural care”. By far, watering correctly is the most important but at the same time, pruning correctly is essential as well so you’re not removing the parts of the plant that are responsible for fruiting!!

24. Where do I go to get a soil analysis?

a. There are a number of labs that you can work with directly and then some nurseries/garden supply stores can facilitate for you. Here is a very comprehensive list put together by a Farm Advisor in a nearby county: <http://cesonoma.ucanr.edu/files/27431.pdf>

25. I am going to be relocating a small plum tree. What are the best practices involved in this?

a. You’ll want to dig the tree up during the dormant season when it is not actively growing. Since the tree is small and likely young, you can treat it like a bareroot tree and lift out of the ground, wash all the soil away and replant as you would a new bareroot

tree. If you wanted to keep the root system intact because you know you planted it right the first time, you then want to attempt to keep as much of the below ground soil/root mass as you can so dig wide not deep!! Of course, this will be more labor intensive than treating it as a bareroot.

26. If the tree has fruit on it from the nursery, do we keep it on there or remove it?

a. I'd recommend removing the fruit and concentrating on getting the tree off to a good start in its new home. In general, it is suggested to remove fruit of newly planted fruit trees to encourage establishment and structure (this is done commercially as well). If you wanted to leave a few on there, I don't think it is going to be a "life or death" decision for the tree but the quality and size of the fruit may not be what it could be when the tree is fully established.

27. How high up do you whitewash a new tree?

a. Paint the entire trunk (you will have pruned it to a single short trunk). If you are not pruning at planting and leaving a tall tree with branching, paint the trunk still and any horizontal branches receiving our burning hot afternoon sun (southwest exposure primarily).