

Horticulture 2008 Newsletter No. 37 September 17, 2008

ORNAMENTALS

Anthracnose on Maple



Normally we think of maple anthracnose as a spring disease. However, this year we have had the weather conditions (moisture and temperature) to allow anthracnose to show up now. Though this disease can cause some leaf drop, there will be no effect on the health of an otherwise healthy tree. Even if the tree lost all of its leaves, it would simply enter dormancy early. There is no need to spray. (WU)

Grow a Mighty Oak From a Little Acorn!

This fall's bumper crop of acorns has many folks wondering how to handle the seeds to produce an oak seedling. The biggest difference is that unlike most seeds, acorns **MUST NOT** be allowed to dry out! If you collected some acorns a couple of weeks ago, and left them in a paper bag or just sitting on a shelf, the embryo in the seed has already died from desiccation, and the acorn will not germinate. If this describes your current acorn



handling, go out now and collect some acorns that have been lying in the grass or under fallen leaves. Float-test the seeds in a bucket of water, and keep only those that sink. The floaters have already gotten dried out, or a weevil has eaten much of the seed inside.

The easiest way to grow oak seedlings is to plant the acorn this fall either in a garden bed or in the location in the landscape where you want an oak tree. If it is from the white oak group (bur, post, white, chinkapin) the acorn will germinate immediately, producing a root this fall, but the top will not appear until next spring. Acorns from the red oak group (pin, red, black, blackjack, Shumard) will not sprout this fall, but do require a cool moist period, called stratification, before germination in the spring. Simply plant 3 to 4 acorns about 2 inches deep in each location where

you want an oak tree, and later thin them out to a single seedling per spot. If sowing them in a garden bed, plant the acorns at least 4 inches apart for ease of digging and transplanting later.

If you have a green thumb, you may want to try raising oak seedlings in a container. In this case store the acorn in a plastic bag in the refrigerator until ready for planting. Any type of pot can work, but a square container is best, as it prevents the oak's long roots from circling the pot walls, resulting in a girdling root. Cardboard quart or pint drink containers with several large diameter holes in the bottom work well. Typical houseplant or seed starting potting mixes are good. Plant the acorns next February or March, so the seedlings are not germinating in the low light conditions of mid winter.

The best locations for growing your potted seedlings are outside, in partial shade, i.e., the east side of a building. This will mimic the field edge environment that young oaks grow best in. Trying to grow oak seedlings inside is more difficult, but can be accomplished on the sill of an unobstructed south window. During shoot growth flushes, the pots will need to be turned almost daily to prevent a crook from forming in the stem, as the seedling grows toward the light. It is best to keep the seedlings in the container just one growing season, and plant the seedling out in the landscape next fall or overwinter in a sheltered location and plant next spring. (CB)

Twig Girdlers



Twig girdlers are currently doing what they do — girdling twigs 6 to 13 mm in diameter. Although girdled branches remain attached to trees via a central core, the weight of some branches may break the core causing the green-leaved branch to fall. In most instances, though, the branches remain in tact.

Eventually, however, girdled branches die, and with the winds of autumn, the dead brittle branches fall and litter the ground beneath the tree.

What about the twig girdler beetles, and why can't we observe them making the actual cuts? While twig girdlers are of substantial size (up to $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch in length), they generally keep out of sight, high up in tree canopies. Even if they are on the lower branches, they escape detection because of their ability to blend into the background.

After female beetles deposit eggs into gnawed notches near bud scars and side shoots on terminal portions of branches, they circle the branch below where eggs have been deposited. Thus, eggs and larvae are ensured of having dry wood in which to develop, whether in dropped branches or those remaining in tree canopies. Twig girdlers overwinter as small borer larvae, and complete their development in spring and summer. Adults emerge again in late summer to repeat girdling activities.

Twig girdlers are a nuisance for homeowners because they produce unsightly lawn litter that may interfere with lawn mowing. There is little to be done other than to gather up and dispose of downed branches. Trees themselves suffer little from this natural pruning process. (BB)

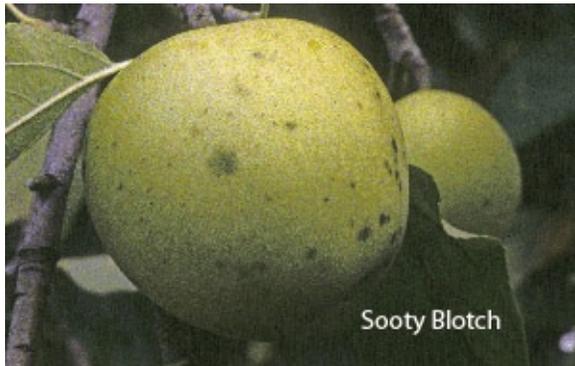
Ornamental Sweet Potatoes



We often receive the question as to whether ornamental sweet potatoes are safe to eat. The answer is yes. Note that they are chosen for ornamental qualities rather than taste and so may not have the quality of our traditional types. (WU)

FRUIT

Sooty Blotch and Fly Speck Affecting Apple Fruit



We mentioned these two diseases in August but they are becoming much more noticeable now. Both diseases affect the apple fruit rather than the leaves. These names are quite descriptive and give a good idea what these diseases look like. Sooty blotch looks like a circular patch of soot about 1/4 to 3/8 of an inch across. In severe cases spots coalesce. Fly speck looks like a cluster of tiny black spots on the surface of the apple that looks like fly droppings. Both diseases are surface problems and don't affect anything but the skin of the fruit. Therefore, the apples are safe to eat. Actually, it is possible to remove the disease signs by using a moistened cloth and vigorous rubbing.

These diseases are easily prevented with a fruit tree spray that contains Captan, and so sprayed orchards usually don't have much of a problem with them. (WU)

FLOWERS

Time to Plant Spring-flowering Bulbs



Late September through October is an excellent time to plant spring-flowering bulbs such as crocus, tulips and daffodils. These plants need to develop roots in the fall and must meet a chilling requirement over the winter in order to bloom in the spring.

Choose a planting site that has full sun to partial shade. The ideal soil would be a sandy loam, but even poor soils can be used if organic material such as peat moss, compost, or aged bark is mixed in. For example, a heavy clay can be amended by mixing in one-third to one-half organic material. Soil pH should be between 6.0 and 7.0.

Bulbs need good aeration as well as good drainage for proper development. It is best if the bulbs are given 12 inches of prepared soil. If one-third organic material were added, this would require mixing 4 inches of organic material with 8 inches of soil. Incorporate about 3 pounds of a complete fertilizer such as a 5-10-5 per 100 square feet during preparation or fertilize according to soil test.

Planting depths vary depending on the size of the bulbs. For example, tulips and hyacinths are set about 6 inches deep, and daffodils are put 6 to 8 inches deep. Smaller bulbs are planted shallower. As a rule of thumb, bulbs are planted two to three times as deep as their width. Planting depth is the distance from the bottom of the bulb to the top of the soil.

Large bulbs are normally spaced 4 to 6 inches apart, and small bulbs about 1 to 2 inches. Planting in clumps or irregular masses produces a better display than planting singly.

After placing the bulbs at the proper depth, replace half the soil and add water. This will settle the soil around the bulbs and provide good bulb/soil contact. Add the remaining soil and water again. Although there will be no top growth in the fall, the roots are developing, so soil needs to be kept moist but not wet. Mulch can be added after the soil has frozen to prevent small bulbs from being heaved out of the soil by alternate freezing and thawing. There is no need to fertilize at planting. (WU)

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