

# Importance of pruning stressed to fruit growers

GETTYSBURG, Pa. - Pruning rules outlined to Adams County fruitgrowers in orchard demonstrations in the beginning of this month can add years to the productive life of peach trees and maintain the peach industry in the Commonwealth, according to Dr. Donald Petersen, plant pathologist for the Cooperative Extension Service of The Pennsylvania State University.

A peach canker disease caused by the cytospora fungus in killing large numbers of trees and forcing growers to curtail plantings in New York, Ohio and

Michigan" added the University Specialist who went on to say that he is convinced changes in pruning and other orchard practices can keep peach growing profitable. "While there is no control for this fungus which attacks all stone fruits, we do understand the problem and can live with it," he added.

Petersen explained how the fungus organisms, always present on air currents, spread during rainy weather when the temperature is above freezing.

Wounds created by pruning cuts, dead tissues

areas caused by Winter injury, or dead dormant buds are suitable infection sites on peach trees. "In one year an infection site will enlarge to girdle small twigs; in two years limbs up to one inch in diameter can be killed by the canker", said Petersen.

"The first step in reducing the incidence of canker lies in training peach trees to a modified central leader, a stronger tree less subject to limb breakage than the conventional vase - form tree" continued the specialist. He called for a change in the time of pruning, urging the growers

to wait as near the time of bud swell as possible, and suggesting that summer pruning leads to fewest infections. "A spray with Bordeaux mixture at Time of leaf drop helps reduce cankers and controls the leaf curl disease", Petersen concluded.

Petersen participated in stone - fruit pruning demonstrations sponsored by the Cooperative Extension Service and featuring Dr. C. Marshall Ritter, Extension pomologist. County Agent Thomas E. Piper presided at the field sessions which were hosted at 9 a.m. by Thomas O. Oyley, Sr., Gettysburg R3 and at 1 p.m. by the I. Z. Musselman Orchards, Orrtanna, and Kane Brothers of Cashtown. Dr. William Bode, entomologist at the Penn State Fruit Research Laboratory shared in the morning session.

"The most important pruning in the life of a peach tree is done the day you plant it" said Dr. Ritter as he demonstrated a technique for pruning newly set trees to favor a central leader. "Plant the tree, remove one

quarter of the top, then let it grow. When growth starts and the shoots are about two inches long, return to select the desired well - distributed branches. Training which is a two-year process, is difficult; pruning established trees is easy by comparison," added the specialist.

Turning to the bearing trees, Ritter pointed out that such a tree may produce up to 7000 flower buds while 500 peaches, size 2½ inches and up would be considered a good yield. Heavy pruning is necessary and requires removal of ½ the shoots from the tree and cutting in half those which remain. Leaving some small one-or-two bud-stubs on the main trunk will promote circulation and keep the tissue alive.

Because of the very cold winter, growers wanted to know how to identify signs of Winter injury. Ritter pointed out that plump buds silvery in color are generally good. The bark on twigs should appear red and not be shriveled or wrinkled. "Cut representative buds in cross section," suggested Ritter.

"The live ones will be green or yellow; the dead ones will be brown or black". "Wind chill temperatures have little or no influence on the buds but air temperatures which dip under 12 to 15 degrees below zero will kill peach buds" he added. Several growers reported taking bouquets of peach branches indoors to force bloom. Ritter cautioned that results could be inconclusive unless you can see that the flower contains a healthy pistil. "If Winter damage is suspected, delay pruning until growth starts so as not to remove live buds which appear on terminal growth," cautioned the specialist.

In response to a question, Ritter recommended painting the trunk and base of main branches with a white latex paint. This reflects sunlight and helps prevent wide temperature differences within the tree. "The problem is most critical during sunny days when the orchards are snow-covered. While the air temperature may be 40 degrees or less, temperatures beneath the bark may reach 70 degrees creating a stress which may cause the bark to split" he said.

"The best quality cherries are produced on trees which are pruned annually" observed Dr. Ritter as he went on to demonstrate how these trees should be pruned. "If the fruit will be harvested mechanically, the center of the tree should be fairly open and the top shaped somewhat like a mushroom."

Petersen cautioned the growers to use Benlate in combination with another fungicide to prevent the development of tolerant strains of the Brown Rot organism reported in other states. He announced that Actidione, a fungicide for post - harvest control of cherry leaf spot and use on non-bearing cherry trees will be available this season.

Professor Bode warned that adult pear psylla became active on warm Spring days and will begin laying eggs in early April. "An oil and phosphate spray applied before egg laying begins is helpful in keeping this insect under control," he concluded.

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