



# HAPPENINGS

## Competitive Trail Ride Winners Announced

UNIVERSITY PARK — 4-H members and leaders from eight counties recently participated in the ninth annual Pennsylvania 4-H Competitive Trail Ride, sponsored by Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

The event, also known as the Keystone Ride, took place on September 17 and 18 and covered more than 30 miles through Rothrock State Forest in Centre, Mifflin, and Huntingdon counties.

The 1993 first-place division winners were Beth Ann Bunnell, Columbia County, junior riding pony; Jollene Shearer, York County, senior riding pony; Laura Turnbaugh, Perry County, junior riding horse; Heather Greenly, Columbia County, senior riding horse; Melissa Castriota, York County, adult/leader lightweight; and Gene Barrett, Columbia County, adult/leader heavyweight.

The annual competition is organized by Ben Nolt, coordinator of Penn State's 4-H Therapeutic Horseback Riding Program, and Patricia Comerford, instructor in dairy and animal science. Richard Ely, 4-H leader in Somerset County, served as this year's volunteer leader.

"Competitive trail riding encourages teamwork between the rider and horse," said Nolt.

"4-H'ers learn to select a good trail horse and properly condition the animal. They develop riding skills and come to know what to expect of themselves and the horse. The experience also teaches youth how to treat woodlands and take care of camp sites and trails. They develop a greater appreciation for nature."

Participants spend months conditioning themselves and their horses for the event. They must complete the ride within a specified time and are judged on their horsemanship, trail manners and the condition of their horse before, during and after the ride.

This year's event was supported by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources Bureau of Forestry, the Nittany Amateur Radio Club, the Penn State Pre-Vet Club, Centre Equine Practice, the State College Air National Guard Unit, the Patton Township Lions Club, Houser Vending Company of State College, Happy Valley Motor Inn of State College and local volunteers.

The 4-H Competitive Trail Ride is open to all 4-H horse and pony club members in the state. For more information, contact your county's Penn State Cooperative Extension office or contact Ben Nolt, 323 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802; (814) 863-3824.

## Make Topiaries For Holiday Giving

NEWARK, Del. — Too early to think about holiday gift-giving? Not if you plan to grow your gifts. Training a plant over a frame to shape into an ornamental topiary is an inexpensive and easy way to make a gift people will treasure, according to Jo Mercer, University of Delaware Cooperative Extension horticulture agent.

"Simple indoor topiaries are easy to create from semi-woody plants such as rosemary and thyme. Both are very fragrant and adapt well to indoor culture," says Mercer. "Elfin herb is also a good choice because it trains easily and blooms most of the year."

Any of the ivy varieties are also a good choice for shaping topiaries. She suggests buying a plant that is growing in a pot only slightly smaller than the container you plan to use. Choose a healthy-looking, not-too-full specimen that is already starting to vine.

"For your topiary, use a clay or

stoneware pot," the agent advises. "The frame structure has a high center of gravity, making lightweight plastic pots a poor choice — they will tip over. A good proportion ratio for frame height to pot height is one to one. Keep the widths equal."

The frame should be medium-weight wire, about the gauge of a coat hanger. In fact, a coat hanger is about the right size for the proportions of a 6-inch pot. The straightened hook can be inserted into the soil near the trunk of the plant. The remainder of the coat hanger is then bent into the desired shape — a simple circle, a heart or a diamond shape that suggests an evergreen tree.

"You don't want to crush or abrade the tender stems of the plant," Mercer says. "So use soft cotton twine or yarn to gently tie the branches onto the frame. Snip off stray side branches only and let the tips grow to reach around the

## Trees Need Fertilizer

Like other plants, trees must have essential mineral elements to grow well and remain healthy.

Since trees thrive in natural areas for decades, it's often hard to understand the need to fertilize them in human-made landscapes. The reason is simply that soil and environmental conditions are changed when trees are transplanted to home grounds, making periodic fertilizing necessary.

If a tree is growing in fertile, loamy soil, it will have less need for added fertilizer. Most trees are not planted in optimum soil conditions however. The following recommendations apply to trees in the home landscape.

First, get the soil tested to determine exact fertilizer needs of the areas where trees are to be planted. Soil test kits can be purchased in the extension office. The cost is \$6 per kit. Office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. The results of the test will include fertilizer recommendations.

Any complete fertilizer is good for trees. The ratio of nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium should be 1-1-1, 1-2-2, or 1-2-1. Recom-

mended fertilizers include 10-10-10, 5-10-10 or 5-10-5. You can substitute such fertilizer types as 20-20-20, 10-20-20, or 10-20-10. However, remember to apply just half as much because these contain twice as much fertilizer.

The best time to apply fertilizer every year, or at least every other year, is late September through November. The next best time is in early spring before buds break. Avoid July through mid-September applications because new growth, forced out at this time, will not harden before the onset of winter. As a result, the new growth will die.

Ideally, you should apply fertilizer just before a gentle rain. This will help the material dissolve and move into the soil. When a dry spell persists, irrigate the fertilized area with 1/2 to 1 inch of water.

The simplest and fastest way to apply fertilizer is called broadcasting - or surface fertilizer application. This method requires little labor and no special equipment. You simply spread fertilizer evenly over the soil surface under tree branches and at least 5 to 10 feet beyond the drip line. Trees that are planted in regularly fertilized lawns probably will not require more fertilizer applications.

The second fertilization method is called the hole or punch-bar method. With this method, you use a punch-bar or similar device to make holes six to twelve inches deep. Make holes five to ten feet beyond the drip line of the tree. This method is advantageous if the soil is compacted or contains a lot of clay. The holes, which contain fertilizer, aerate the soil and provide nutrients to the trees.

With the hole method, you should spread evenly the recommended fertilizer rate in the holes using a funnel and a small cup as a measuring device. After placing fertilizer in each hole, finish filling the hole with sand, crushed stone, perlite, peat moss or loam soil.



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entire wire frame."

She recommends checking the ties frequently to prevent girdling. Remove ties that are too tight. Gradually, the plant will become self-supporting and ties can be removed altogether.

After the entire length of the frame has been covered, snip off the tips to encourage side shoots to grow. This will add the fullness that camouflages the structure.

"Once your topiary takes shape, it can be dressed up for the season," Mercer suggests. "A circular topiary lends itself well to becoming a wreath. Just add miniature lights powered by batteries and a bright red or plaid bow to complete the traditional holiday symbol."

## Cracks In Trees?

Large cracks that develop in trees are often blamed on one of two causes - the freezing and thawing of the trunk during the winter, or the effect of direct sunlight on the trunk during any part of the year. Traditionally, cracks have been thought to develop on the outside of the trunk and move inward. However, *Arbortopics* (2371 S. Foster Avenue, Wheeling, IL 60090) reports that research on tree growth and function suggests this may not be true.

Studies by Dr. Alex Shigo, a respected plant pathologist who has done endless research on the internal functions and care of trees, indicate that cracks begin to form inside the tree and move toward the surface. Cracks may originate from wounds, improper pruning cuts, root injury, branch stubs, or weak crotches. The important point to realize is that the crack originates inside the tree — completely out of view from the outside.

Freeze/thaw cycles, drought, wind, and heat all can cause swelling and contraction of tree stems. These actions may serve to force the internal cracks toward the surface. The environmental conditions did not create the crack; they stimulated an existing crack to move to the surface.

Crack formation can be prevented with proper tree care. Eliminating weak crotches, proper pruning cuts, and wound prevention are the keys. Tree wraps and pruning paints do little, if anything, to prevent cracks. Cracks can form beneath tree wrap as if it wasn't there. A growing number of researchers and nurserymen are recommending not using tree wraps. As we learn more about trees, old ideas continue to give way to new procedures.



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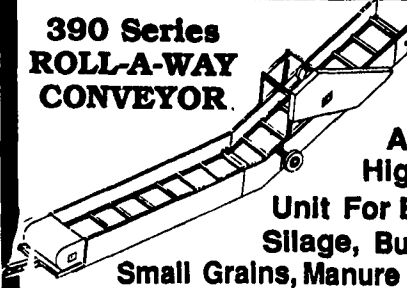
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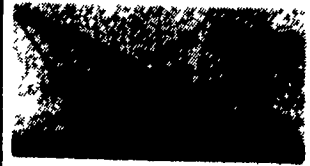


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