

State Hort. Members Tour Annapolis Valley

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the market for Pennsylvania and Nova Scotia to use once the tree has set fruit.

Blossom thinning is a new approach that Charlie Embree is researching with the help of area orchards. According to

Embree, the ideal time to spray a blossom thinner is between 24 and 48 hours after the king blossom opens. He also states that, "Timing and the rate of applications are, of course, critical." There is a very small spray window and spraying too

early may thin the king blossom and not the weaker cluster blossoms. If sprayed too late, no fruit thinning may occur. Presently, Pennsylvania has only one labeled blossom thinner, WilThin.

Irrigation

A study is under way in Nova Scotia to examine if trickle irrigation and/or mulching increases yield, fruit size, fruit quality, and tree growth. This study is being conducted on four farms in addition to the Atlantic Food and Horticulture Research Centre in Kentville. The study is in its third year. Although data was continuously taken for the past 14 years, the findings, vary a great deal. At this time, the researchers at Kentville have not come to any conclusions.

Another collaborative experiment demonstrated on the tour was the application of calcium and boron to an orchard through trickle irrigation. The purpose of this study was to see if this method influences bitter pit, scald, and firmness. The experiment began in 1997 continues. Like the first experiment, no conclusions have been made.

Insects And Diseases

Of all the insects and diseases found in an orchard, the two most emphasized were anthracnose canker and European fruit borer. Anthracnose canker probably enters an orchard from the nursery where the trees were purchased. The fungus prefers a cool wet climate, typical of Nova Scotia weather. The canker not only does

devalue healthy wood, but can completely girdle a tree. The spores travel by both wind and water. Spores are not easily controlled because a fungicide would have to be applied during harvest. The most acceptable way to control the canker is by heavy pruning or by cutting out infected branches.

European fruit borer goes after healthy trees. They seem to attack only certain varieties of apples such as Northern Spy, Gravenstein, McIntosh, and Cortland. The borer is a very tiny insect, but can kill trees. No established method exists to control the borer, a new orchard pest. Luckily, we do not have any European fruit borer in Pennsylvania.

Our last evening meal was at Hall's Harbour Lobster Pound. There, several things happened. We saw the tide come in and lift the boats off the harbour floor. When Eli, Don Smith's 2-year-old son, got his first glimpse of his mother's two-pound cooked lobster, he looked at it and cried in fear. I do not think he will be eating lobster for a while.

By the way, here is some lobster trivia. The largest lobster ever caught in Nova Scotia was 22 pounds in Halifax. The gentleman who caught it could have received \$10,000 for it. He declined the money and returned the lobster to the ocean.

I would like to thank Dr. George Greene and Maureen Irvin for all of their efforts in making this a wonderful trip.

Dig In To Determine Below-Ground Quality Of Tree

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — Whether shopping for cars, houses or a tree, most consumers pay attention to what they can easily see.

When it comes time to purchase a tree from a nursery, a plant scientist in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences suggests digging a little deeper to examine what's beneath the soil line.

"Homeowners should pay attention to below-ground quality," said Jim Sellmer, assistant professor of ornamental horticulture. "The quality of the root system is the most important factor in whether a tree will survive transplantation and adapt to its new site."

"Just taking a quick look at the trunk, branches and foliage is a big error when choosing nursery trees," Sellmer said. "If the root system is of poor quality, undersized or damaged, the tree is not likely to survive."

• Size does matter. The greater the rootball size, the more likely the tree will survive transplanting. There are minimum standards to observe for both trees and shrubs. A rough guide is to have a rootball with one foot in diameter for every inch of trunk diameter. "Be practical," Sellmer said. "If the rootball is too big, you'll have a hard time planting it without damaging it or you."

• Choose the right burlap. Natural, untreated burlap is

best, according to Sellmer, because untreated material decomposes quickly. Burlap treated with a rot-resistant copper compound also works well, and both materials can be planted with the tree.

Sellmer recommends removing the burlap from the upper half of the root ball and stuffing the loose material into the lower sides of the hohle. "If you leave the burlap sticking up above ground level, the material will act as a wick, absorbing moisture that should be going to the tree's roots," he said.

• Remove plastic burlap. "Plastic burlap used to be shiny and green, and even inexperienced gardeners knew to remove it before planting," Sellmer said. "In the '80s, manufacturers created brown, woven plastic burlap that looked remarkably natural. Be sure to remove any plastic material from around the root ball."

• Remove any ropes, twist-ties, or string. Many nurseries use twine, rope or twist-ties to fasten identification tags or other signs on nursery trees. "Don't assume twine or wire will fall off," Sellmer said. "These materials can dig into bark or the root ball and cause serious problems."

• Partially remove the metal basket covering a root ball. Many larger trees are dug and transported within a wire basket to contain and protect the tree's root ball. Sellmer says the upper six inches should be

cut away and removed. "Metal wire may not rust away fast enough to allow proper root growth," he said. "If you remove the upper third of the basket, it gives the roots ample room to grow out into the soil."

• Look for the real tree trunk. When trees are grown in nurseries or on farms, soil often is piled onto the tree's trunk when cultivators are used between the plant rows. Before planting, consumers should carefully remove soil from the top of the root ball until the natural flare of the root system is visible.

"Soil can be piled up four to nine inches onto the trunk," Sellmer said. "If the trunk looks like a telephone pole in the ground — just sticking straight up out of the soil — that's a clue that you need to remove some soil to get down to where the root system starts to spread or flare out like the bell of a horn."

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