

Our Springtime Ritual



I'm not totally sure yet but I think that Spring is almost here. It seems to like to play "Hide and Seek" with us for a while here in Memphis. In any case, in the process of it's arrival we have again endured another of the Mid-South's wild roller coaster temperature rides that have made most of our flowering trees only "okay" this year, especially the pears and the crabapples. The cherries seem to have done a little better.

And for those who enjoy and appreciate the value of our trees, springtime is often thought of as the traditional time to fertilize. But a caveat should go right

"springtime is often thought of as the traditional time to fertilize. But a caveat should go right here."

here. Many folks still hold to the false notion that the generic cure for almost any real or supposed tree problem or deficiency is to throw some fertilizer at it. The truth is that sometimes indiscriminant fertilization can do more harm than good. As an example there is one root rot disease called Phytophthora that frequently afflicts mature oaks and that also thrives on nitrogen almost in the same way that fire thrives on gasoline.

HOW FERTILIZER WORKS

So it's helpful to understand a bit about how to read the fertilizer bag and what each of those elements do for you. For starters, almost all fertilizer formulas are identified by a three-number designator, identifying the amounts of Nitrogen (N), Phosphorous (P), and Potassium or potash (K) and in that order. Remember "N-P-K". For example, the commonly used fertilizer "Triple 13" con-

tains thirteen pounds of Nitrogen for every 100 pounds in the bag, ie. 13%. And the same for phosphorus and for potassium. But there are several more things to keep in mind at this point.

Some minerals are primarily utilized in the spring of the year while others are mostly beneficial for fall functions such as root growth. In Memphis, so long as the soil temperature stays above 40 degrees roots continue to grow even through the winter months. That's why fall is a

better time to plant here, giving the new transplant a head-start before it has to use

sugar energy to produce leaves and stem growth.

Then there's the issue of mineral availability. Different minerals hang around in the soil for varying periods of time. Nitrogen is usually the first to disappear (leach out). For that reason a slow release form of nitrogen (N) is frequently preferable, dispensing its benefits over a longer span of time in the spring.

When it comes to longevity (staying power in the soil) potassium (K) is in the middle range. And Phosphorus (P) can be stable in the soil for years. The other thing about phosphorus is that it can become excessive and work against you. So you may not need to apply additional amounts at all. But how can you know?

USING A SOIL REPORT

That's where the information from a soil test can be helpful before trying to fertilize. Not only will a complete soil report tell you about

pH values, it will also give you the estimated rate of nitrogen release and the levels of macroelements in the soil (Phosphorus, Potassium, Calcium, and Magnesium). It will also advise you about the organic content of your soil. Organic content is important because clay soils with low organic content tend to aerate poorly and drain slowly, creating a possible toxic anaerobic (oxygen void) condition that can rot roots.

While you cannot usually change the nature of your soil, the best response to an anaerobic soil condition may not be fertilizing at all. It may be more helpful to consider mulching, (see *Spring 2006 Newsletter*) organic soil amendments, mycorrhizal spore inoculations (*Summer 2005 Newsletter*) or even installation of vertical columns to assist in soil aeration and water dispersal.

If the pH of your soil is not right; that is, if it's too high or too low, even plenty of important mineral presence (fertilizer) in the soil does not help because particular minerals may be bound up chemically with other elements, making them insoluble and therefore unavailable to the plant or tree. A value between 5.6 and 6.2 is good for most deciduous trees.

In summary, it is always best to get a soil report from a sample taken near your trees. This can provide important diagnostic and management advice before "slinging fertilizer" or coming to any other off-the-cuff conclusions about what your trees may need. Call me if you'd like to get some help with doing this right.



From My Journal: *Writing A Life*



I've been writing down my thoughts and impressions into the pages of blank books for a long time now. In the last ten years or so, I have preferred a nicely bound leather journal of a size still small enough to be conveniently transported. But it was not always so.

I was in the sixth or seventh grade when I first undertook this initially laborious and later on, periodically dangerous practice. I've always heard that the best writers frequently draw from their own experiences. Maybe that's why that in the beginning there was in those blue (25 cents) composition book pages very little real content beyond mundane short entries such as "It rained again today." Or maybe I'd note that I "...went to school and got an 'A' on my composition." It was no doubt for a time a tediously forced thing, motivated only by my naïve desire to begin following in the exciting tracks of one of my childhood heroes.

Richard Halliburton, originally a Memphian himself, wrote about his travels over the then-still-mysterious and exotic world as it was in the late twenties and thirties and indeed right up until his death. Near the

end of the decade of the thirties he was lost at sea while making a passage on a Chinese junk that was caught and sunk by a sudden typhoon in the South China Sea. But his freelance non-itinerated style shined like a beacon to me and was the model that I dreamed of emulating. At some point in his short but adventurous career Halliburton was alleged to have asserted that "...the greatest thing is to be able to travel the world and then make your living by writing about it." So in those pre-WWII days Richard Halliburton became the author of a series of

his own travel-adventure books. His Royal Road To Romance and subsequent volumes were probably only slightly exaggerated and a number of them became best sellers in an era when most people could still only dream of departing over San Francisco's then-under-construction Golden Gate and flying across the Pacific in one of Pan Am's newly inaugurated China Clippers.

A decade and a bit later, in the early and mid-fifties, my own good fortune was in attending a little country school (creaky wooden floors, hissing steam radiators and desktops with those archaic round ink well holes perforating the upper right surface). It was a school so small that the 3rd grade shared a room and a teacher with the 4th and the seventh grade did the same with the eighth. But it was a genuine locus of early education, one whose dedicated principal was also the first of two teachers in my educational career who encouraged me to keep on writing. I was in the minority of those in Helen Humphreys' classes who thrived on the composition assignments.

Shortly thereafter, during my high school years at Germantown I was privileged to be in both the 9th grade and then the 11th grade English classes of Frances Haynes. Mrs. Haynes would later move on to be, for years prior to her retirement, the Language Supervisor and then Director of Staff Development for the Shelby County School System. In those classes we had, usually on Fridays, the inevitable weekly privilege of composing a paper on a selected or assigned topic. It was a paper that frequently might contain one or more of the galaxy of vocabulary words from lists that we

were simultaneously exhorted to master. I still have on a shelf somewhere my old dog-eared copy of Building Word Power.

As time went on my paper composition books upgraded to something a bit more respectable and durable. And oddly enough, it was becoming easier to find words for the pages. But I never managed to hitch-hike to New York and take on passage as temporary crew aboard a tramp freighter and as a free-vagabond with a

Smith-Corona portable typewriter and a blank notebook in tow. Instead I enlisted in the Marine Corps and after Parris Island, became a Marine. But I continued to write because there were always new people to understand and stories to tell and places to see.

A few years ago one of my three daughters remarked that there could possibly be a fight, after my demise of course, over possession of the gaggle of journals – and there are fifty-eight of them now – that are stacked up in my office closet. I am not quite sure what to think about that. Many of those

"But I never managed to hitch-hike to New York and take on passage as temporary crew aboard a tramp freighter and as a free-lance vagabond with a Smith-Corona portable typewriter and a blank notebook in tow. "



Following Blue Val to Anegada



Our Cockpit: Best place to eat in the BVI

books contain accounts, some with line drawings and pasted-in photographs, of trips that my wife and I have made to various places over our near forty years of marriage. There are stories in there of fascinating people we met on the trains and others of snatching our packs and impetuously jumping off when we'd

(Continued on page 3)

spot a scene that tweaked our imaginations. For us, itineraries were always anathema.

In those pages are descriptions of island anchorages and of romantic moonlit meals in the cockpit during three different bareboat sailing adventures in the Caribbean. There's another multi-page account of a harrowing but hilarious four days of navigating Parisian streets on a bicycle.

Others of days pedaling through vineyards and small medieval towns in Italy and southern France.

There are the stories of the marriages of our three girls. One of them a kind of story-within-a-story, of going back to my closet to find and then read at her rehearsal dinner from a much earlier volume my exuberant account of her own first toddling steps, wondering there



in that now long ago entry how many more steps she would take before I would walk her down the aisle. There at her rehearsal dinner, I could read my old words only haltingly from the fuzzy pages of the old book as they brought moisture to all of our eyes. I got an emotional kiss and a teary hug for that one.

Rather prominent in more recent volumes are sea stories from the ongoing annual reunions with old Marine buddies of forty years, long now considered brothers. Then there are the accounts of the births of our grandchildren.

There are seven of them now, phenomenal stories all.

And so many others. But also mixed in there is my inescapable and frequently uncomfortable mandate to tell the truth as I saw it at the time.

How could I know in the heat and passion and absolute certainty of some particular circumstance that as I moved through my life one day at a time, my "truth" and my views of reality would frequently morph, evolve or even slither away like a snake in the weeds? More than a little of it would necessarily involve repentance and forgiveness. The truth could even at times contradict itself while in the sometimes embarrassing process of making me out as a fickle dim wit or worse?

But my closet stash is what it is and I've not torn out any pages so far. It is most of all the story of God's amazing grace and mercy throughout my life and more. It is a vault for my memories and experiences. It is also a seed bed for ideas and writings of all sorts and kinds. And from the beginning that's what I wanted to become, a writer. Now at last and for better or worse, I no longer have to be confined to "It rained again today."



The Magnificent Elm

If you have an American Elm in your yard it is probably a fairly large one and one that you inherited with the property, maybe years ago. These days I rarely see or know of people transplanting elms from scratch. Nurseries may or may not have them but they are surely not a feature item. That is sad. I think this is primarily because of the decades long "bad rap" that elms have gained in connection with the vascular wilt disease known as Dutch Elm Disease (DED).

But this avoidance was not always the case. In the thirties and forties our parents and grandparents knew the native elm as a very desirable street tree, one that helped to define what we know today as Classic Americana. A shady and arbored Elm Street was once literally and exactly that in the nostalgic American small town.



Then the imported disease hit our shores and though it took a while, devastation followed. For a long time there was no cure or stopping it. Entire populations were wiped out.

But we now can enjoy again those welcoming shading arms over our heads. Elms are both strong and beautiful and make a winsome environment even more so. They just need to be protected.

If your elm is a native American variety, it is more susceptible to DED than other Asian types.

Individual trees can go for years with no issues and then suddenly begin showing random leaf yellowing in the crown. This flagging is a classic early telltale of the disease which is primarily transmitted by the Elm Bark Beetle. The beetle moves from infected trees to

healthy trees and in the process of tissue feeding, inoculates a tree with the fungus that is carried on its mouth parts.

The best protection is to treat an important elm preemptively and preventatively with a fungicide. But the disease can be suppressed even after infection if treatment is administered promptly when the symptoms have just appeared. A suppressive fungicide combined with an insecticide to control the beetle is the recommended two-pronged response for elms that are already symptomatic.

Trees that are more than 20%-25% symptomatic are recommended for removal.

The best time to protect an uninfected giant is when the leaves are just before full size in the spring. I have been injecting client elms in Memphis for more than twenty-five years. So far ... and as far as I know... I have not lost a preventatively protected tree to DED.





MORGAN TREE SERVICE, INC.
THE "VITACARE" COMPANY
 10548 Latting Rd.
 Cordova, TN 38016



Phone: (901) 756-9893
 Fax: (901) 737-2986
 E-mail: morgantreeservice@morgantreeservice.com

VITACARE CLIENT

Fire Blight



By the time that this letter gets into your hands it may be getting a bit late but hopefully not too late to suppress the degenerative effects of the bacterial disease called Fire Blight in your ornamental pear trees. The disease also appears in crabapples, apple trees, and hawthorns. Fire Blight gets its name from the scorched appearance it gives to affected twigs and leaf clusters. They will look shriveled and browned just as though they had been burned with a propane torch.

If you saw this phenomenon last year, then it is important to inject your tree now. A timely antibiotic treatment into the cambial tissue of the tree's stem suppresses the destructive effects of this disfiguring and potentially lethal disease. The most effective

time to administer treatment is at or near the time of flower and shortly after the probability of a late and serious freeze.



*Fruit spurs on pear with fire blight infected blossoms
 (Photo by A.L. Jones, Michigan State University)*

Symptomatically damaged tissue should be pruned from the tree as soon as it appears and destroyed or re-

moved from the site. In doing this, it is important to sterilize the pruning equipment after each cut in order to avoid re-inoculating clean tissue with the bacterium. When removing damaged tissue from the tree, each pruning cut should be six to eight inches inward into healthy tissue in order to also remove incipient inoculum that is present in as yet non-symptomatic tissue. Also, leaves and twigs on the ground should be completely gathered up and removed since they also have the potential of disease re-infection.

Trees that are so seriously infected that pruning out all visibly affected tissue would disfigure the overall tree may be candidates for removal.

Did You Know . . .

. . . that when you are moving a young tree to a new site, the diameter of the root ball should be minimally between 8 to 10 times the trunk diameter (measured about six inches above the soil line for trees up to 4") in order to bring along enough root system for a dependable healthy start. Also, if you have to transport the tree to the site over a distance of more than ten miles or so, it is recommended to cover the canopy (leaves) in order to prevent excessive water loss in transit resulting from wind.

Container grown trees can frequently have a mat of circling roots that, if excessive, should be severed vertically along the sides of the root ball prior to setting in the hole in order to subsequently encourage radial root expansion.

If you have future plans for moving a small tree on site in the following year, a preparatory root pruning can be helpful in confining a larger percentage of the new root growth within the prospective root ball. This is done by cutting about 50% of the roots in alternate spade widths around the outline of the root ball that will be actually dug the following year.



We're on the Web!

www.morgantreeservice.com

