

Citrus Maintenance Continued

Wow! Last week's article generated lots of phone calls and e-mails about citrus and are still coming in. This week, we'll continue with information on citrus care, since so many are interested.

Trimming Citrus: Most questions we received concerned the trimming of citrus. Basically, citrus is an evergreen and it does not need to be trimmed, as you would a peach tree. You do not want to cut off the skirt of the tree. Approximately 20 to 25 percent of the tree's production is in the skirt.

You can trim out dead branches or twigs, but you would not normally cut the tree back. The only time commercial producers trim trees is when they are very large and production slows down due to a lack of light in the canopy. Another reason would be, when they can no longer get a tractor between the rows, due to the size of trees. If this occurs, the grower trims the tree in January by cutting back the top of the tree at an angle facing the morning sun. This puts light in the canopy and eventually increases the production; however, the first year after trimming, production will be reduced.

If you would like to see the kind of angle that commercial growers put on the trees there is a grove on Monte Cristo Road where the trees were trimmed last year. If you are traveling on 281 North from Expressway 83, exit Monte Cristo Road to the East (right) and approximately two miles down the road, you will see a grove on the left hand side. This is just after the second traffic light after turning onto Monte Cristo. I believe the street at the light is Alamo Road. At this grove you will see mature trees have been trimmed at the top and the sides to allow for equipment movement only.

Overall Pest Management: The other very popular subject was spraying the tree for some sort of overall pest management. Strong chemicals with a residual effect are not available for any plant. There is no general chemical to spray to kill bugs forever (or for a year or for six months) and, you really want to be specific about what you kill. Anything too strong will kill the beneficial insects and these are the ones that help keep a pest in check. When you use any pesticide, use the chemical for a specific pest, approved for use on citrus, and follow all directions (for your safety and the environment's).

Healthy trees are not stressed out and do not attract a host of pest problems and disease. So, follow the fertilizer and water management tips from last week and if you would like to learn more about the care of plants in the Rio Grande Valley, our Master Gardener volunteers will be hosting a "Gardening in the Rio Grande Valley" class, conducted on four Saturday mornings in McAllen, beginning January 22, 2011. The cost of the class is only \$45.00 and the class is from 8:30 to noon. For more information, contact our office at (956) 383-1026.

For those who would like to purchase local, organically grown citrus and vegetables, our Farmer's Market will be held today at the corner of Main and Lindberg, just two blocks north of the Expressway 83 Service Road in McAllen, from 9:00 to noon. Turn north on Main, go two blocks and we are there.

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