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GREEN pages

**The Best Desert Gardening
News You Can Use**

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WINTER 2010

Easy Care Roses Some Options for Staying Low Maintenance & High Color

Not everyone new to the Desert Southwest is aware that roses do quite well here. Though we do have a harsh climate with winters that freeze and summers that roast, all around the valley you'll find roses that look gorgeous every spring and fall. True; during the summer they will look a bit bedraggled, but just who doesn't feel that way when it's 110° outside. Though I recommend that you find a spot with morning sun, I've seen roses do amazingly well even planted in full afternoon sun.

An issue that is often the case with roses though is that they need special care because they are prone to disease, like mildew and black spot as well as insects. You'll need to give them special pruning and they just seem finicky. Often the case but not always!

Over the past years botanists have hybridized new cultivars that resist mildew, and other fungal diseases. An important introduction was made in 1995 by a hybridizer named Werner Noack. He developed the Flower Carpet Rose. Later his son Richard continued hybridizing these and now we have many varieties to choose from. These are all very low maintenance, disease resistant and drought tolerant.

Take the Carpet Rose for example. These are generally considered Groundcover Roses, but they will reach up to 3 feet tall and just as wide. For many applications, like near your front windows, this is an ideal height. Because Carpet Roses have superior disease resistance, you won't constantly be worried about mildew and black spot. This should make them worth a consideration.



The variety here is new and called Flower Carpet Amber Rose. It offers flowers that come in shades of peach and pink.

Properly cultivated, Flower Carpet Roses can produce as many as a thousand blooms in a year.... Wow!

Iceberg Roses are another of the easy care roses you can grow here. Introduced in 1958 these very colorful additions to your garden are

also prolific bloomers. Maybe you thought Iceberg Roses only came in white? Well there is good news here too.

The Iceberg Rose is a Floribunda type and typically grows to 3 to 4 feet in height with a spread of up to 5 feet or more. Pruning for floribunda roses is more simple than with Hybrid Tea Roses in that you needn't worry so much about the specific location on the stem and slant of a cut, but simply prune to form.

This trouble-free rose will fill your garden with color virtually non-stop all season, while it keeps your garden work time to a minimum. Like the Flower Carpet, the Iceberg is mildew resistant.

Though Icebergs are subject to a few fungal diseases, by keeping your watering off of the leaves you can minimize this.

Some Iceberg roses are climbers, or vining roses in case that appeals to you.

What is a disease resistant rose?

Disease resistant does not mean disease proof. A disease resistant rose is a hardy variety that will not be as susceptible to an attacking disease. You'll not have to spray as often to keep the plant healthy, and if you follow good horticultural practices; keeping the foliage dry, well trimmed and thinned out for good air flow and proper plant spacings, you may not have to spray at all.

Rose breeding is a process of decades not years. Rose flowers have male and female parts (stamens and pistils). When a rose is pollinated within it's own flower, it naturally has the same mother and father, and so will have



the same characteristics. If we want something new, something that is disease resistant, we need to make some changes.

What the hybridizers have done is experiment around with the pollen from the stamens on one flower and the pistils from another. This "cross-pollination", if successful will create a rose with different characteristics from either parent. The process is actually very complex and time consuming. They eventually have a new variety with all the characteristics desired. Then they take cuttings from this new variety and these cuttings become the new "cultivar". All we have to do is purchase the new cultivar.

Other Cultivars



The Knock Out Rose is another group of disease resistant cultivars developed in the past few years. Tons of flowers and drought tolerant. Resistant to black spot, mildew and rust. Even shade tolerant. They have good fragrance and are a super addition to most every landscape and garden.

This is the Pink Double Knock Out rose. The petal count is 35 to 40 and one plant will produce an awesome display of color. There are even Hybrid Teas that are disease resistant like Just Joey and Electron, and Floribundas like Europeana and the Playboy Rose. So, don't give up

on having roses just because you heard they were too finicky.

Where and How to Plant Groundcover and Floribunda Roses

Because these types of roses are relatively modest in size, there are lots of options for your garden. Plant them individually among other shrubs. Their color will make a super accent. Plant along an otherwise drab wall and provide a bright colorful border. They make fantastic colorful hedges. To keep the show going during the cold season plant them among some eye-catching winter annuals like pansies or snapdragons.

Basic Care

As with most of your plants, don't over water. Most of these roses are drought tolerant and do best with 3 days a week water during the hot season when established. You do need to check the moisture though because not all soils drain at the same rate. Roses (like fruit trees and many other flowers) like to eat! That means regular fertilization through the flowering season. There are liquid fertilizers; Dr Q's Liquid Gold Dust and easy to use Dr Q's Rose Food granular fertilizers, so it doesn't need to be difficult to see that they get fed.

Pruning for the Groundcover and Floribunda roses is very simple and really only needs to be done in late March and September.

You'll find free Rose & Fruit Tree Pruning and Winter Plant Care seminars at all the Star Nursery stores.

Roses: Saturday, Jan. 8th and 22nd, 10:00 am and 2:00 pm.
Fruit Trees: Saturday, Jan. 15th and 29th, 10:00 am and 2:00 pm.

Winter Highlights

Easy Care Roses
Your Family's Christmas Tree
Compost What is it - Benefits?
Frost Tender Plants
Calendar
Saving Next Summers' Fruit
Winter Weed Prevention
Expanding Plant Root Zones

Your Family's Christmas and Holiday Tree Selection, Care and Recycling



The holidays are a time for family gatherings, great food and celebration. The tradition of a cut fir tree adds a wonderful fragrance and charm to our homes. The combination of your decorative imagination along with the natural beauty of a genuine conifer brings out the absolute best in holiday spirit.

Beside, the holidays just don't seem the same without a "real" tree.

Did you know: This tradition also benefits our communities and our economy in other ways? There are about 1 million acres in production for growing Christmas trees. These tree farms provide enough oxygen daily for the requirements of 18,000,000 people. They also "consume" carbon dioxide! As long as we are responsible in how we care for and dispose of our tree, live-cut conifers truly provide many important benefits! The jobs they provide are now more important than ever.

Selecting your tree. Pick out your tree after you have made an inspection of the space in your home that you intend to place it. The spot you pick should be as far away from heat sources and air ducts as possible. Then take a quick measurement of the height and width available in the area you have in mind. Now lets' go shopping for your next holiday tree.

Many families come into Star Nursery to select their tree every year as a matter of tradition. We do our best to see that the trees we have to choose from are healthy and beautiful. We also provide that "fresh cut" for good water uptake. Wherever you go to purchase your cut tree, make sure you check the freshness of the tree as well as the beauty and shape, so that you have safety as well as enjoyment.



Some trees with more spacing between the branches might work better if you have large ornaments. Trees with unusual form can actually be made to look spectacular with a little imagination. You may find a tree placed on its stand "off-vertical" due to a poor initial cut. This might look bad, but can

easily be remedied before you leave the store.

If you've found a tree that appeals to you, check it's freshness. A few inner brown needles from the tree's annual shed will drop off so do not be too concerned with this. To begin checking your tree's freshness, run your fingers through the branches; shake the tree to remove these dead inner needles. Now, the needles remaining should be flexible and not fall easily. Grasp a branch with your thumb and forefinger and pull it toward you to check for flexibility. If the green needles continue to come off, or the branches are just too stiff; choose a different tree.

When you purchase your tree from Star Nursery we will make sure you get that "fresh cut" on the base of the trunk to allow for water uptake. Also, ask for and hold onto the recycling notice they give you to help you remember how to recycle your tree after the holidays are over. When you get your tree home, keep it watered to ensure freshness throughout the season.

Once home, place the tree in water as soon as possible. Most species can go 6 to 8 hours after cutting the trunk and still take up water, but every minute counts. Don't bruise the cut surface or get it dirty. If the bottom becomes damaged, dirty or overly dry, the best idea is to re-cut it. Always keep an adequate supply of water in the tree stand. Tree preservatives can help keep the pores of the trunk open, but won't do any good if you don't keep water in the tree stand AT ALL TIMES.

Way too often Christmas trees are tossed into the garbage and headed for the landfill. Make the removal of your tree a part of your holiday celebration. Think about what type of impression you want to make when you decide what to do with your old tree. You spend great energy to teach your children to be considerate and responsible. The decision as to what to do with your tree is an important responsibility! Give the old tree another life! It truly can be an good example of citizenship, as a tree returns to mulch. Demonstrate that happiness is a community affair, and recycle that tree. For more recycling information, call the Springs Preserve at (702) 822-7700.

Important: Never burn your Christmas tree in a fireplace or wood stove. Pines, firs and other evergreens have a high risk for uncontrolled fire.

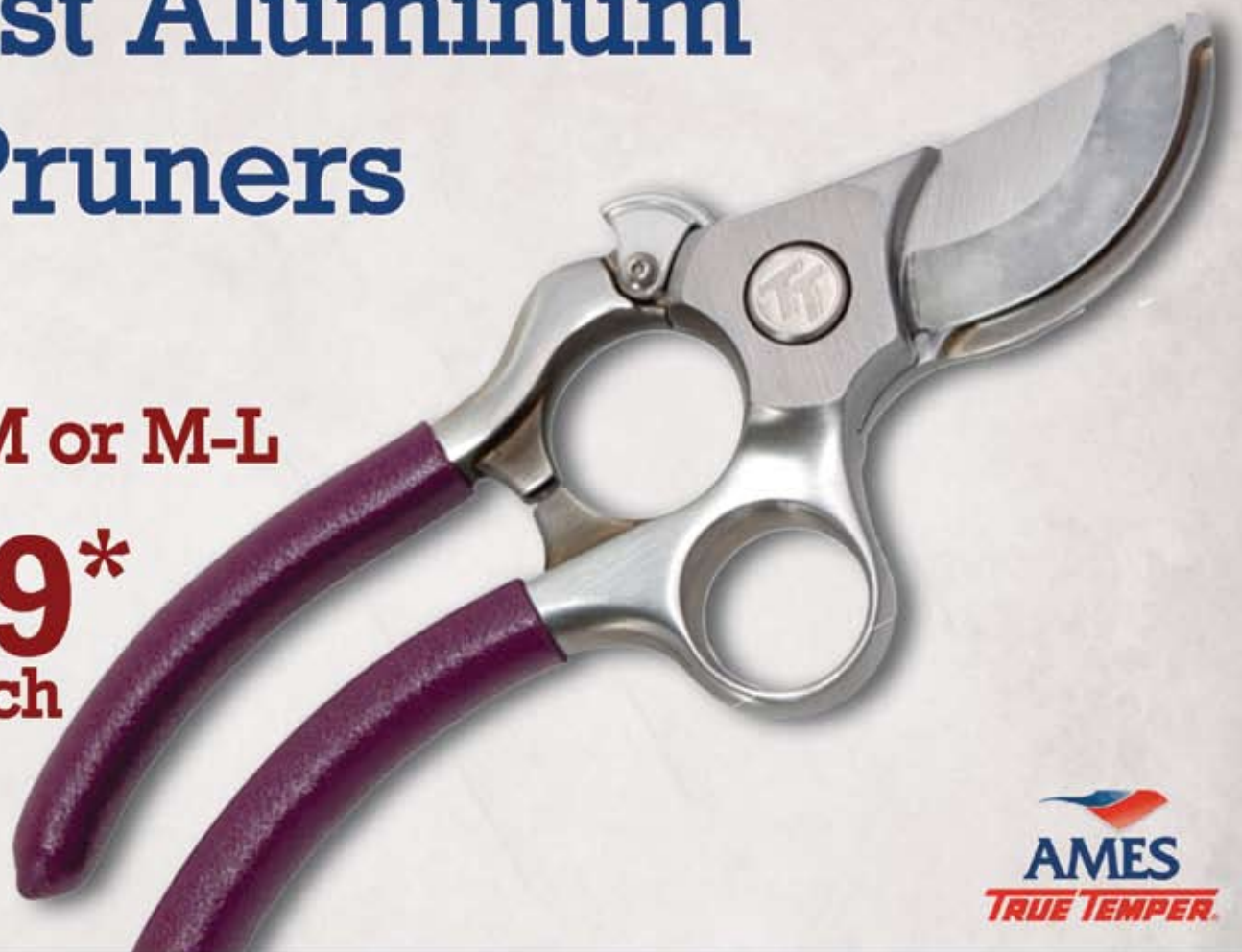
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Compost - Planting Mix Just what is it - Why we use it

Although there are many varieties of soil throughout the desert southwest, for the most part our soils are rock and clay. Drainage is very poor and the soil is compacted and hard. To simply dig this soil up, then replace it around a new shrub or tree is to beg for the dirt to return to the extremely hard, non-porous, non-breathing soil that it was before the hole was dug.



On the other extreme of hard-packed slow draining soils are those landscapes that are extremely sandy and fast draining. If nothing is done to enhance the retention of water, we will very likely have plants that die of thirst.

Here's what a functioning soil should do: decompose organic matter toward humus, glue soil

particles together in aggregates for good structure, protect roots from diseases and pathogens, retain nutrients, transport retained nutrients to the plant, produce hormones that help plants grow, help maintain proper pH levels, filter pollutants.

Functional soil is an extensive ecosystem consisting of minerals, bacteria, fungi, protozoa, nematodes, arthropods, and earthworms. These interact and together they perform vital functions for healthy soil. A functioning soil is able to transport nutrients to the plant, protect roots from diseases and parasites, produce hormones that help plants grow, break down pollutants, and improve good soil structure. Here in the desert southwest they also perform a vital role decomposing the available organic matter in order to keep pH at tolerable levels. A balance of sand, silt, clay and organic material is required for optimum plant health.

So, what is compost?

Technically, compost can be comprised of a number of different organic materials; from plant trimmings to food waste. Compost is simply material that is "de-compos-ing". There can be a number of health issues related to composting certain food items, and one needs to carefully observe and control the process to keep it safe. However, when using only

vegetative matter for composting (no dairy or meat) these issues are less of a concern. Dr Q's Paydirt, a premium compost, uses no dairy or meat products and is completely organic.

Almost anything added to the soil is a soil-amendment. Fertilizers are amendments that provide specific nutrients, while composts, mulches or soil builders provide the foundation for complex functions in the soil. The goal of using compost is to know the limitation or deficiency of the soil and then using compost; correct that deficiency, enabling the soil to function.

Bacteria and fungi, kept in balance, are beneficial to soil. They act as decomposers, consuming pathogens and organic matter and producing sticky, mucus-like substances that act as glue to hold the soil together. These aggregates provide good soil structure, allowing air and water to move through. Providing this "organic matter" is required in order to keep these tiny microbe workers on-the-job.



Millions of species of fungi exist. Some fungi are decomposers consuming simple sugars, while another group - known as mycorrhizal fungi - are beneficial to plants and, for some plant species, are vital to their survival. Mycorrhizal fungi work in a symbiotic relationship with plant roots, drawing their energy from roots and providing the host plant with increased nutrients. Mycorrhizal fungi are catalysts in the microbe-producing process. Fungi produce enzymes that further break down tissues, making nutrients such as nitrogen available to plants. Forming vast networks of tiny filaments, fungi contribute to soil structure and the general health of the soil.

Developing a quality soil profile in your landscape is the goal. In order for the plant roots to soften up the surrounding soil and break through the "in-ground pot" symptom so common here, the area surrounding the plant must increase in microbial activity. Plants naturally stimulate microbial activity by sending out signaling compounds through their roots. These natural chemicals cause fungi and certain bacteria to begin growing and helping the new planting survive, breaking up the surrounding, hard soil.

Too rich a mixture of organic material is not recommended however. The microbial activity that currently exists would be overwhelmed. You can think of microbial activity as a small campfire burning hot and bright. If you were to drop a large amount of wood on the small fire, your fire will smoke and probably smother. Organic matter can decay in two different directions: it can decay into beneficial humus (microbe food) increasing microbial populations; or, it can ferment into alcohol, which acts like a preservative, preventing microbial activity.

Dr Q's Paydirt is a premium product because the process by which it is made is carefully controlled and completed BEFORE the planting mix is bagged and shipped into a Star Nursery store. If you want the best for your new plants, use only Dr Q's Paydirt and then add some Gold Dust Starter fertilizer to assure the new roots are given the right formula for growth. Top this off with Dr Q's Plant Tonic in order to spur new root growth and reduce shock and you're giving your plants the absolute best start possible.



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Frost Tender Plants Special Care in the Winter

A question I often hear is: "Why do we sell plants that struggle in our winters"? This is not only a valid query, but the answer should also prove interesting and educational.

Just as many gardeners choose to plant summer annuals, plants that are certain to die during the winter, many landscape enthusiasts want to try to grow a number of beautiful shrubs or flowers that "may or may not" make it through the winter.

Take Bougainvillea for example. This plant, some forms are little shrubs but most are vines, puts out such a massive display of color and loves our heat so much that many folks are willing to put up with the loss of the plant in the winter to enjoy it throughout the warm season. It is advisable not to try and plant too many of these gorgeous plants due to the winter risk, but one or two can add a lot to a landscape, and replanting in spring is really not so tough. After all the hole is already dug.



There are techniques that an avid gardener can use to optimize the chance for a frost tender plant to survive winter. Often just planting in a sheltered south facing location will be enough to help many plants make it through the cold. Many gardeners see these challenges as fun. By reading up on that special care plant they want and doing the recommended steps they participate in a very interesting experiment. How rewarding it is when we are successful in growing a plant or three that doesn't generally do well in our winter.

Putting burlap over the top of a frost tender shrub is certainly one technique that is often used to protect frost tender plants. Mulching over the root system is a basic "must" for the winter preservation of these tender little guys. Piling bark around the base of the plant during the winter and removing the pile when the warm season comes on is another. Mini-Greenhouses and coverings with Christmas lights are still other techniques that can work. It depends on the plant and the severity of the winter.

One thing for sure; you'll only want to try this with plants that you really

like and so are willing to put up with the extra effort. Most of our winters will see at least 6 days or more of temperatures down to 29°F., so plants that are likely to be damaged at this temperature are frost tender. Sometimes we get a cold snap during winter that gets down to 18° or 20°F, and when this happens even more cold hardy plants may suffer or die. If you only want plants that will handle even the coldest winters (like 1991 at 8°F) then the variety of plants to choose from will be very limited. Planning a landscape here is an art and everyone has differing tastes. I like to recommend that the majority of shrubs selected for a design be capable of surviving at least 18° so that replacement efforts would be minimized in an unusually cold winter. When it comes to trees; remember once these are mature it is heart breaking to lose one in the cold, so be careful in your choices. Avoid planting frost tender plants just before or during the cold season, this is just asking for trouble.

Here are a few popular frost tender plants and the temperatures they are likely to be damaged at: Aloe (27°F), Aralia (28°), Tropical Bird of Paradise (29°), Bougainvillea (33°), most Euphorbia succulents (30° - 38°), Citrus (28°), Tropical Hibiscus (32°), Mandevilla (29°), Queen and Pygmy Palms (28°). The Tecoma genus; Cape Honeysuckle, Yellow Bells, etc. are damaged at 28°, but they all recover nicely in the spring. There are many citrus trees growing throughout the valley, producing nice crops of lemons, oranges, grapefruit, kumquats and more. Star Nursery sells these in "dwarf" varieties so that they can be more easily covered and protected.

A healthy plant can withstand cold weather much better than one in stress. So everything from proper deep infrequent watering to fertilization, soil amendments (to control high pH), and mulching all play an important part in keeping your plants healthy and able to withstand cold. Desert gardening is not very easy and this is one good reason to read the Green Pages. Even cold hardy plants can struggle in our winter if under stress.

We sell frost tender plants because our customers demand that we do. Then we provide all the technical support possible in order to help them have the best chance. Sometimes there is success and sometimes not. It's all part of gardening and you know; if there weren't some risk I don't think it would be as much fun.

Dr. Q's Winter Gardening Calendar

December

- Fertilize winter lawns to maintain good color with a product like Dr Q's Winter Gem.
- To avoid icy sidewalks or lawns, water between 9 am and 10 am.
- Want winter color? Plant Pansies, Snapdragons and Stock. These are cold hardy and will bloom through April.

January

- Protect tender succulents and cacti from cold by covering them with N-Sulate.
- Prune your roses – don't forget the "Rose Potion" and attend our seminars (see front page)
- Gray aphid population explodes in the winter, try a long lasting insecticide like Bayer Rose & Flower Insect Killer, so you don't need to spray so often.
- Protect deciduous fruit trees. Use Liqui-Cop and Volck oil where appropriate.

February

- Pep up your house plants by repotting them into slightly larger containers. Use a high quality potting soil like Filthy Rich™.
- This is the month to prepare your vegetable and flower beds for spring gardens. For each 100 square feet of soil, sprinkle four pounds of 16-20-0, ammonium phosphate.
- Treat soils with Green Light's Iron & Soil Acidifier. Mix well and then water. Top this off with three inches of organic mulch.
- Seeds to sow: African Daisies, Alyssum, Basil, Carnation, Delphinium, Gaillardia, Gloriosa Daisy, Hollyhocks, Larkspur, Lupines, Nasturtium, Pansy, Petunia, Phlox, Poppy, Scabiosa, Shasta Daisy, Snapdragon, Sweet William, Verbena, Viola.
- February is fertilizing time for deciduous fruit, nut and shade trees. Use Dr. Q's Fruit and Nut fertilizer, Dr. Q's Tree, Shrub & Vine, or a balanced fertilizer. Apply according to rates on the bag.

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During the winter our deciduous fruit trees like: peaches, apples, apricots and others are sleepy, dormant and so we tend to just leave them alone. However their bark is often laden with insect eggs or fungal spores that are just waiting for the nice weather to come again in the spring. Then they wake up and begin their assault on our wonderful crops or fruit. You know, insects and various germs are part of nature's competition for this food, and we can't just expect to have success unless we get in there and do something.

One of our fruits common enemies here in the desert southwest is coryneum blight. This is a fungal disease where the spores hibernate over the winter on twigs, branches and buds.



The spores produced from these tissues are later spread through the tree and neighboring trees by rain and wind. As they mature they will cause substantial damage to the fruit.

The lesions produced by this disease are easy to spot, but after the fruit has been infected like this, the damage is irreversible. The fruit will be

tough, less flavorful unattractive and basically not desirable. As you see, most of the fruit in the tree will be affected.

Coryneum is active at low temperatures, which is why it can become such a problem. With as little as 24 hours of moisture from a winter rain storm and temps even as low as 36°F, this fungal disease can grow and spread. Effective treatment is usually a combination of pruning and copper based fungicides (like Liqui-Cop) during January. Care should be taken when disposing of the pruning debris! There are many other fungal disease that attack our fruit trees, but this is one of the most common.



Insects are another cause for loss of a fruit crop. Many, like these lecanium scale insects are soft bodied and over-winter on a fruit tree on twigs and branches in their nymph phase of development (see photo at top of second column). They produce large amounts of honeydew waste, which then also adds to the opportunity for the tree bark to develop sooty mold. So, not only do you have the likelihood for fruit damage from the insect, but then also from the disease the insect will help to promote.

Insects can live on your trees throughout the year. They can hide under the bark during the winter months only to emerge in the spring to consume



leaves, buds and blossoms. There are actually a combination of techniques available to help control these kind of insects on your fruit trees.

A number of different horticultural oils have been used for a long time in controlling scale insects, aphids and mites on woody perennials. Several new oils have extended this benefit to herbaceous plants. Oils block the air holes through which the insects breathe and in some cases they act as a poison as they interact with the fatty acids of the insect. An extra benefit of some of the horticultural oils is that they can help control powdery mildew which is another threat to our local fruit crops. Because these oils disrupt how an insect feeds they can reduce the transmission of viruses from one plant to another caused by aphids or similar sucking insects.

Oils are easy to apply, pose few risks to people and do not generally threaten beneficial insects like lady bugs. They do need to be applied during the cool season. Applying an oil onto plant foliage during temps exceeding 90 degrees is risky. You can find Volck Oil at Star Nursery and this is an excellent treatment for your fruit trees to be used during the winter.

Pruning should be done in conjunction with other treatments as it represents a technique that helps to establish other aspects of plant health. Prune deciduous trees during January to help eliminate the pests that would target rotten wood. Remove any decaying or dead wood and crossing branches. Remove dropping and rotting fruit from around the base of your trees promptly. Rotting fruit is a breeding ground for many insects, which also attack the live fruit still attached to the tree.

Remove any plant debris in the area of your fruit trees. Rake up all fallen leaves and fruit to avoid pests, bacteria and mildew. Remember that stressed trees will more likely be attacked by insects than healthy ones. Help your trees fight off pests by providing deep infrequent irrigation and routine balanced fertilization with a product like Dr Q's Fruit and Nut Tree Food.

Once the early spring flowers drop and your tree has set fruit, apply an organic pesticide spray, like Spinosad. Reapply it once every three weeks throughout the growing season to keep these pests under control. Also pick your fruit a little early, before it is ripe. This is another way to keep insects from becoming a big problem. Early picked fruit will continue to ripen on its own, while fruit picked late will spoil. Make sure you give yourself the best chance to enjoy the fruits of your labor!



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Winter Weed Prevention Winter is the time to do something

Because of the cold temps we usually don't think about weeds much during the winter, but we should! Sure they aren't sprouting up all over the place now, but the seeds are on the ground and they are just waiting for the warmer temperatures and perhaps a bit of rainfall to get started.

Most of the plants commonly classified as weeds here are spread by their seeds. Many of these are annuals, like Crabgrass or Poa Annua. These typically do not survive the winter. Without these plants getting re-started through seeding, they wouldn't be much of an issue.



Crabgrass (on the left) is one common pest in desert lawns as is Poa Annua (below). This grass will generally make your lawn look "spotty" with small dark green patches during winter.

Have you ever gone out into your yard and pulled or killed all the weeds only to see them return in a few weeks? This is probably because the weeds had seeds. If you used a

post-emergent herbicide, it killed the living plant but did nothing to prevent the seed from germinating and producing new weeds later.

In Star Nursery's chemical aisle you'll find regular post-emergent weed killers. Like Round-Up these kill living plants, but do not affect dormant seeds. Look here and further, on aisle end caps and in the front section of the store for our pre-emergent weed killers. Products like GreenLight's "Portrait" and "Amaze" or others. Here is how they can be helpful to you in your attempt to control weeds.



Pre-emergents prevent seeds from germinating. These special herbicides typically do not have post-emergent in them so they do not harm any of the live plants in the area. So, provided you read the label, you don't need to worry about hurting plants that you want to grow and thrive, when you apply a pre-emergent. Also these types

of herbicides generally last for up to four months in the soil, so only a few applications take care of your problems for a long time.

Just when is the best time to apply a pre-emergent? Lets consider when seeds are likely to germinate. Cold temperatures inhibit most seed germination, so though they may be lying on the soil waiting, it is unlikely they'll be doing much without a little warmth. Warmer days can often begin as early as February. The other thing they usually need is a little moisture. They can get this by being located near other irrigated plants or in your lawn. Even though we don't have much rainfall here weed seeds have plenty of opportunities to get started.



Spurge is one of the bigger lawn nuisances here and it is very controllable with pre-emergent. By applying 4 month pre-emergent in mid to late February to those areas of your landscape where you do not want volunteer plants, you can effectively control these until June. Another application in late June will give you control until late October.

In your lawn, the prime consideration is whether you intend to over-seed or not. If you apply pre-emergent to your lawn it will prevent the grass seed from germinating the same as... spurge seed for example. So, if you want to use a pre-emergent and you need to over-seed your lawn, you'll want to get the grass seed going first before you apply the pre-emergent. Also, the new grass seed will be vulnerable for a little while after it has first sprouted. Read the label on the pre-emergent to confirm this, but generally I'd wait at least four weeks.

Whether they are in your lawn or your landscape weeds are a nuisance. Post emergent herbicides like GreenLights "Com-Pleet" or a weed-n-feed work well to make the weeds disappear quickly. In order to get some long term control make sure to use a pre-emergent weed preventer whenever you treat with a weed killer. A small amount of effort this winter to prevent weeds can reduce your overall maintenance a lot!

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Expanding Plant Root Zones During the winter is the best time

A very common problem in a drought prone part of the country like the desert southwest where we live, is that a tree or shrub's root system becomes much too small to support the plant as it matures. In areas where rainfall is sufficient, the soil surrounding the base of a larger shrub or tree contains enough moisture that the plant's roots will grow and expand to a size large enough to maintain health. Because our soil does not get sufficient natural moisture for this to happen, our plants often have very small root systems; roots that only extend to the location of the few emitters that were initially put near the base of the tree or shrub.

With most plants a poor RSR (Root System Ratio – too small of a root area compared to foliage or canopy area) means stress, summer scorching and often early plant death. Insufficiently sized root systems can weaken a tree resulting in potential insect infestations or other problems. We need to make every attempt to have our plants roots be at least nearly as large as the canopy. Just how can we do this?



One positive aspect to most of our desert is that the winters are reasonably mild. The ground doesn't freeze

and so the root systems will continue to grow during this season. As our plants mature in size, we need to make sure to

ADD more emitters and place them further from the base or trunk of the shrub or tree.

Netafim or Emitter-Dripperline can be effective tools to be used in order to accomplish this. These innovative products have been around awhile, but many folks aren't aware of the convenience and the increased efficiency of water distribution they offer.



The dripperline actually has emitters installed right into the tubing, so the water is fed in a ring around the plant. Perfect for helping roots to expand!

Also due to the fact that we live in this constant state of drought, xeriscaping is a popular option here. Basically this technique utilizes a rockscape surrounding a pallet of drought tolerant shrubs and trees (photo above right). Unfortunately adequate irrigation area surrounding these trees is often overlooked.

Dripperline like Netafim can easily be layed out in a grid around the trees (photo above left) in order to "maintain" the root system ratio

in this case. When done correctly this can prevent the loss of trees and shrubs that has become too common with xeriscape projects.

Usually RSR is adequate for a younger plant. If planted properly the hole should be at least twice the diameter of the nursery pot and this allows for the roots to expand for a year or so. The trouble usually comes later. The top growth of the tree or shrub becomes substantial, but the plant still only has a couple emitters and these are located right at the trunk or base. The result is like a tree growing in a "pot in the ground". The roots stay small while the plant gets big. Not a good combination! And way too often the cause for decline and early death. Fruit trees are among the more sensitive to this issue. Because they produce fruit, they need "extra" nutrition and water and this can only come from an expanded root system. Four to six years into maturity I've seen so many wonderful fruit trees lost to borers and this was cause by a poor root system ratio.

You've made an investment in your yard and landscape to make it beautiful or productive. You need to follow up on this investment and help to expand the root systems of those plants that need it as they mature. Though there are a few native species that typically do not need this, most of the larger shrubs and trees do. This is the time of year to help your landscape plants develop healthier root systems, and the temps are right for getting out in the yard to install a few more emitters or some dripperline.

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