

IN THE DIRT

2013 Plant Fair
Friday, May 3, 2013
6:00 to 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, May 4, 2013
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Cox Activity Center
Northeast Community
College
Norfolk, Nebraska

Drought Damage to Spruce Trees

Drought damage to spruce is appearing across the state. Affected trees appear grayish-green or dull green. Some are browning. If the soil is dry, water these trees when outdoor conditions allow which is when soil is not frozen and air temperatures are above 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Wait until about June 1 before pruning to remove damaged branches. The buds and twigs near the ends of Spruce branches may still be viable. If new growth occurs here and survives, the damaged area will eventually be masked by new growth.



April Garden Activities

- Plant cole crops, lettuce, onions, spinach, and parsnips as soon as the ground is dry and workable.
- Plant carrots in early to mid April.
- Plant successive crops of cool season vegetables.
- Plant dormant strawberry and asparagus crowns.
- Earthworms move close to the soil surface in spring and their activity often creates a rough, uneven soil surface. Earthworms are beneficial, increasing air and water movement in soil and increasing thatch decomposition. There are no pesticides labeled for earthworm control. Although some pesticides and fertilizers are known to have an impact on earthworms, none can be recommended as controls. Core aerifying, power raking and verticutting will break down some of the castings and reduce bumpiness. Use of a heavy roller is not recommended due to creation of soil compaction.
- Mow lawn at 2.0 inches. Mowing frequency should be dictated by growth rate. Never remove more than 1/3 of the turf's height at any mowing. Alternative and preferred- throughout the growing season maintain Kentucky Bluegrass lawns at 2.5-3.5 inch height and return clippings to promote rooting and stress tolerance.
- Watch for "cool season" spruce spider mite damage on spruce, juniper and pine now through May. Tap a suspect branch over a white piece of paper to spot the mites. If mites are a problem make two applications of insecticide at 7-10 day intervals for control. Control spruce spider mite with a dormant oil/ horticultural oil application on affected spruce, juniper and pine. (Oil will remove the blue needle color of blue spruce.)
- Fertilize established asparagus and rhubarb plants.
- April 20 to May 10, fertilize Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue with 1 lb. of actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq.ft. using slow release fertilizer products. Apply preemergence herbicide for crabgrass, goosegrass and foxtail control.



Bush Cherries

The most common and adapted cherry that Nebraskans and people from the Midwest are familiar with are tart cherries. Of these cherries the 'Montmorency' has been the long time standard in the Midwest. The 'Montmorency' is a medium sized tree that has been in cultivation for over 400 years. Other varieties of tart cherry includes 'Evan', 'Rose' and a recent release named 'Balaton'. There is also a naturally dwarf variety 'North Star' available, which is extremely hardy and thrives in the harsh Midwest environment.



History of Shrub Cherries

A less known form of tart cherries is the bush cherries. Bush cherries are extremely hardy (Zone 2), suffer from relatively few insect and disease problems and actually have a higher sugar content than tree types of tart cherries. Development of bush cherries began in Canada in the 1940's and resulted in a type that was marketed as the Mongolian cherry. During the 1980's crosses were made with the naturally dwarf tree form 'North Star'. The result of crosses between these tree shrub forms was a shrub form of tart cherry that is very hardy and has the high quality fruit characteristics of 'North Star' with increased sugar content.

Recent Releases

The first of these crosses released was named 'Carmine Jewel'. It reaches a height of 6 feet and a width of 5-6 feet. Spacing between plants should be 6 feet. 'Carmine Jewel' is self-pollinating, meaning the flowers from the bush will pollinate each other although a second pollinating type of bush cherry could result in increased fruit set. Fruit yields for established plants can approach 30 pounds.

The newest developments out of Canada include five varieties that were released as the Romance Series in 2005. These include 'Juliet', 'Valentine', 'Cupid', 'Romeo' and 'Crimson Passion'. All five varieties have larger fruit with a higher sugar content than 'Montmorency' and other tree forms of tart cherries. These varieties are not yet readily available in the United States but can be found with some diligence.

Site Selection, Planting & Care of Bush Cherries

When planting bush cherries and other long-term crops it is always important to begin with a soil test and correct any deficiencies prior to planting. Bush cherries require much less space than the tree types. Row spacing of 6 to 7 feet from center of plant to center of plant will allow easy access for harvest and promote good air movement to help reduce disease incidence.

Bush cherries have relatively low fertility requirements and most Midwestern soils have adequate fertility levels unless the soil test indicates otherwise. If fertilization is warranted it is important to fertilize early in the growing season during the period of rapid growth. Later season fertilization may promote growth too late in the season and possibly result in winter injury to the plant.

Watering is extremely important early in the development of the plant. The most common plant size available is rooted cuttings that are one year old with a limited root system. It is important to make sure the plant has adequate soil moisture available for growth. Conserving soil moisture through the use of mulch can reduce the need for irrigation and help in the control of weeds which will sap soil moisture away from the cherries.

Fruit Production

Bush forms of cherries begin producing fruit sooner than the tree forms. Fruit production begins at the third year. Full production is achieved during the fifth year if the plants have experienced normal growing conditions. Twenty to 30 pounds of fruit can be expected per plant once the cherries are established. Depending on the variety, harvest can be as early as late July or as late as September.

Pest Problems

Bush cherries have few disease and insect pests. The primary disease issue to watch out for is cherry leaf spot. Cherry leaf spot is a fungal disease which will turn the leaves yellow. These yellow leaves will be covered with black spots that contain the fungal spores. Heavy infestations can result in total defoliation of the tree soon after harvest. It is important not to let this happen as it is extremely stressful on the tree, can reduce winter hardiness, and greatly affect the following year's crop. Fungicide application beginning early in the season will easily control this disease.

Cherry maggots can be an issue many years and are the larval form of a small fly. These small larva are found inside the fruit itself. Spraying to control this pest needs to begin early in the season to insure worm free fruit. Consult the *Midwest Tree Fruit Spray Guide* (<http://www.extension.iastate.edu/Publications/PM1282.pdf>) for recommendation on all your insect and disease problems.

Bush cherries can be a highly productive addition to your acreage landscape. Their versatility allows them to be planted in a variety of settings. They can be an integral part of your formal or edible landscape because of their beautiful flowers and fruit. You can plant them in a windbreak enhancing the structure while supplying delicious cherries to you and wildlife. They are well worth the effort.

Bird of the Month — Bluebird



According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Eastern bluebird has a big, rounded head, large eyes, and a short, straight bill for eating insects. The wings are long, but the tail and legs are fairly short, on a plump body. The male Eastern bluebird has bright feathers on his back and sides, with a rust-colored throat and breast. Females are gray colored with bluish wings and tails, and orange-brown breasts. Overall, the female has more subdued colors than the male.

Eastern Bluebirds prefer open country, where they perch on wires, posts, and low branches while looking for insects. In late fall and winter they will eat berries from trees and shrubs such as cedars, sumac, and dogwoods. Bluebirds migrate south in late fall as their food supplies of insects and berries disappear, although a few may stay all winter if there is a good supply of berries. They return, looking for nesting sites in late February and March. Tree cavities and nesting boxes are most used for raising the 2 to 4 broods of young each year. The European Starling and house sparrow may compete for nesting sites.

The female lays about 4 to 5 blue eggs, although a few may be white. Eggs hatch in 14 days, and both parents feed the young insects for up to a week. In the nest, young bluebirds can be prey for snakes, feral cats, and raccoons. Starlings, house sparrows, and wrens also may smash eggs or kill young.

If the bluebirds survive their first few months after fledging, they may live two to three years. In the 1970's bluebird populations showed a sharp decline, probably due to the loss of habitat (open grassland with scattered trees and nesting cavities) and competition from other birds such as starlings and house sparrows. Bluebird populations have been increasing, based on the number of sightings in the annual Backyard Bird Count. This may be due to groups such as Bluebirds across Nebraska that are dedicated to helping the bluebird by providing nesting boxes and maintaining bluebird trails.

You can hear the call of a bluebird at Cornell Lab of Ornithology at http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Bluebird/sounds.

Source: Acreage.unl.edu - photos taken by Marion Ball

