

## **E-letter # 12 – April/May 2014**

Written by Peter Coppin 22/03/14 – can be reprinted as long as the author is acknowledged

Hi everyone, here are some hints & reminders for April & May.

### **1. Advanced reminder on autumn sprays:**

May is the month to apply copper-based sprays to fruit trees, a very effective tool in controlling many fungal and bacterial diseases. The timing of this is rarely mentioned by other information sources, which only mention winter/spring applications. More details are in a previous E-letter, which you can read here: <http://www.petercoppin.com/eletters/eletter8.pdf>

### **2. Fertilising:**

Sorry to sound a bit grumpy, but there is a lot of bollocks written and spoken about fertilising trees and vines at this time of year.

Yes, young trees on unimproved sands will need more regular fertilising (especially Nitrogen) because of sands poor nutrient retention, and the trees can be actively growing throughout the summer season. But it's a lot different for established plants.

Firstly, we need to remember that deciduous trees & vines are totally different to evergreen species, and do 75-80% of their nutrient uptake between bud-burst and the New Year.

Now, as the weather changes, feeder-root activity slows to a near halt as they get ready for winter dormancy, so most fertiliser applied now will be wasted (especially the water-soluble products).

If you see moderate-severe foliar nutrient deficiency symptoms now, you've missed the boat and will have to wait until late winter or spring to rectify them.

Evergreen trees & vines, however, put on an 'autumn flush of growth', indicating new feeder-root activity. Remember my rule of thumb – 'only fertilise if you see new growth'.

It's also a great time to put on some more trace elements as evergreens have a much higher requirement than deciduous species, and thus need two applications per year rather than just one.

Of course, if you're using a quality organic fertiliser containing adequate amounts (such as the better rock-dust products) you may not need to apply more.

For a brief on fertilisers and plant nutrition, read my previous E-letter here:

<http://www.petercoppin.com/eletters/eletter10.pdf>

### **3. Pruning:**

Once again, evergreens need to be separated from deciduous species, and some pruning can be done during the autumn flush of growth when there will be varying levels of growth response to the pruning cuts.

But limit this to basic shaping and sizing, though Eureka lemons respond to a heavier pruning at this time. Heavy pruning on all other citrus can throw their hormones out and they may flower at the wrong time.

Deciduous trees & vines are a different story. Apart from actively growing young trees that may respond to a bit of shaping or training, it's best not to do any pruning now.

Now as most species/varieties are heading for dormancy, they will draw nutrients out of the leaves and store them behind the buds and in the bark ready for their spring burst of life. Most 'detailed' pruning should be left until mid-dormancy, especially species such as peaches, nectarines, grapes and kiwifruit.

However, if you have trees that are just way too tall you can head the tops out now. This is because such cuts done later during dormancy are actually invigorating cuts and will cause rampant vertical regrowth from the point of the pruning cut.

### **4. Planting new trees & vines:**

The evergreen vs deciduous saga continues. Autumn is a great time to plant evergreen trees & vines because the soil is still warm and the plants have active roots.

It helps get them some new roots established before many of them may go into a cold induced semi-dormancy during winter.

## Planting trees & vines (cont'd):

It may also slightly reduce the risk of frost damage in spring, but if you're in a high frost risk area it may pay to leave planting until October or even November.

If you do plant now, make sure the irrigation is set up because we seem to have warm to hot dry autumns lately.

All deciduous species of trees & vines are best planted during winter dormancy, and ideally never later than bud-burst. This both minimises planting shock and gives them the best start in spring when their buds burst into life.

Newly planted deciduous species often need some fairly brutal pruning after planting to encourage growth to form the desired skeletal framework, whether on espalier or as a vase tree. This is always best done before any sign of bud-burst.

### **5. Soil amendments:**

Autumn and winter are great times to amend soils, whether it be adding clay to sands or gypsum to responsive clays. After the first rains, the soil is much easier to work, but also the winter rains can help to incorporate these amendments.

Also, if the soil has to be dug or turned over, this is the time when least damage may be done to the plethora of beneficial soil organisms, from bacteria through to mites, beetles & weevils.

It also gives you the time to install or reinstall reticulation systems, and, more importantly, to reapply mulch before the drying winds commence in September and temperatures rise.

The 'spring rush' of activity most of us seem to do is totally inapplicable to our climate and soils, rather it simply reflects our cool-climate European heritage where maybe it does apply.

Many of you may have also noticed that over the last few years we don't seem to have a 'normal' spring anyway, rather we seem to jump from winter to summer in a very short space of time.

So it's very easy to be caught way behind schedule in the spring, putting extra stress on new plantings. Don't worry if your friends or neighbours think it's odd that you are installing irrigation in autumn or winter – you'll have the last laugh knowing your plants are going to be watered efficiently as soon as they need it!

For my fact-sheet on amending sands, see [http://www.petercoppin.com/pdfs/amending\\_improving\\_gutless\\_sands\\_soils\\_perth\\_wa.pdf](http://www.petercoppin.com/pdfs/amending_improving_gutless_sands_soils_perth_wa.pdf)

Please note this is nearly a year old now, and there's an increasing amount of new products on the market, plus prices may have changed, but it's still a good basic guide.

### **6. Buying and planting trees & vines:**

Many nurseries and garden centres will soon be taking delivery of new stock, especially the evergreens, so it's a good time to work out what species/varieties you want and get in early while they're still in stock.

Don't buy discounted stock from last season, as they're likely to be root-bound, rather insist on new stock even though you may have to wait a bit.

Mid-dormancy is the best time to plant deciduous trees and vines, but much of the new season's planting stock may come onto the market as early as May (though normally June & July). Even if you're not ready to plant just now you will get the best selection, even if you pre-order them to make sure you get the varieties you want.

This is especially so for the semi-dwarf stonefruit varieties which are short in both variety choice and supply. If you want to keep these trees less than 2.5-3.0 metres in height it could well pay to wait a year if you miss out this season; rather than to plant trees on vigorous rootstock that are very difficult to keep manageable.

Bare-rooted trees are dinosaur technology - I prefer container grown plants, with one advantage being you can hold them for many weeks before planting. However, don't let the pots dry out completely.