

E-letter # 13 – June/July 2014

Written by Peter Coppin 03/06/14 – can be reprinted as long as the author is acknowledged

Hi everyone, here are some hints & reminders for June & July.

This is the Nyongah season of [Makuru](#) – a cold and wet time of the year (fertility season), but more reliable water supplies means that the inlands can sustain life. Food sources are some birds including emus, kangaroos, yams/tubers, bardi grubs, etc.

1. Seasonal shift:

There's no doubt that over the last decade there has been a seasonal shift, with winter arriving 2-4 weeks later than 'normal'. But this year we have had a terrific wet May, so let's hope we see more of this in future years.

However, one thing that is unfortunately not changing is the increase in average daily minimum temperature, and this has its challenging effects. The worst is that deciduous trees may not know it's time to go dormant for winter.

Winter dormancy (or senescence) is mainly triggered by changes in day length, but with many species is also accelerated with cold temperatures.

Remember that most deciduous species need a reasonable number of chill units to initiate bud burst and flowering in the spring. Lack of chill accumulation results in poor flowering and therefore poor crops, and if serious can lead to delayed foliation (and can be fatal to some varieties).

It is possible we may get a dry June, which normally means we will get more chill hours accumulating. This makes it important to have the trees in dormancy when the cold weather arrives. Remember, that a tree is not dormant until the last green leaf has fallen.

This process can be assisted with the use of autumn and early winter sprays. The next two sections link you back to previous E-letters that cover these topics in more detail.

1.A Reminder on autumn sprays:

May and June the months to apply copper-based sprays to deciduous fruit trees and vines, a very effective tool in controlling many fungal and bacterial diseases. More details are in a previous E-letter, which you can read here:

<http://www.petercoppin.com/eletters/eletter8.pdf>

1.B Reminder on winter sprays:

Winter is the time to apply oil sprays to deciduous fruit trees, and late winter to apply sulphur-based sprays to vines in warmer (earlier) areas. More details are in a previous E-letter, which you can read here:

<http://www.petercoppin.com/eletters/eletter9.pdf>

2. Pruning:

A. Deciduous trees & vines:

Once the leaves are off it's easier to see what you're doing, especially on those species that need detailed pruning. This detailed pruning for fruit only has to be done according to what age wood a particular species flowers on, so here is a quick guide:

Every year: peaches, nectarines, grapes & kiwifruit

Every 2-3 years: apricots, plums & pomegranates

Every 4-5 years: apples, cherries, pears & quinces

Every 5-8 years: figs

Persimmons are pruned only following a light crop, and this varies from tree to tree.

Pruning for size & shape should be done during the growing season, not during dormancy, because pruning dormant wood invigorates new growth while summer pruning suppresses growth.

The only exception is if you need to restructure or resize a tree, and this is always best done during dormancy. However, this requires a lot of follow-up summer pruning over the next two seasons.

B. Evergreen trees & vines:

This will be covered in my next E-letter, though any resizing or restructuring can be done from mid July onwards.

4. Planting new fruit & ornamental trees & shrubs:

I have covered buying planting stock in previous E-letters. Here we look at the quality of nursery stock, or should I say the all too common lack of quality.

I have done numerous consults and inspections of dying or declining trees & shrubs (both fruiting & ornamental), and the number of times this is caused by girdling roots or being 'root-bound' is of concern.



Here is one of four Chinese elms in decline in this garden (the Judas tree to the left is already dead).

I looked at the base and there's a large girdling root slowly strangling the specimen (this should have been rectified at planting):



You are usually told not to disturb the roots of potted trees & shrubs, but rather to gently tease out the root system. How are you going to see if that root system has a good structure or has some serious defects?



At my workshops many people gasp in horror when I shake off all the potting mix into the planting hole, but this is the only way to be able to properly inspect the root system and then prune off problem roots.

Here's a supposedly 'new stock' citrus I bought in a 4L pot that would have eventually choked itself.

Any root thicker than 4-5mm with a kink or bend 90 degrees or less should be pruned off:



What chance did this next plant ever have?



And here's a real classic (thanks to Sean from The Garden Whisperers for sending it to me). This specimen was obviously planted as an advanced tree, but the root system wasn't properly exposed and laid out. If you look closely at the centre, you can see the original root system as it came out of the pot:

