



Let's Talk Trees

Ethics Loyalty Integrity Quality of Life

Northwest Plant Health Care, Inc.

What's New

In our region, the winter season is a time when most people turn their attention away from working on their landscape. The holidays, along with the cold and wet weather, serve to slow our pace here at NPHC too, but it also offers us an opportunity to refocus our efforts.

While many landscape companies become dormant this time of year, or nearly disband due to seasonal layoffs, NPHC utilizes the time to expand and enhance the knowledge of the Certified Arborists that serve you. Educational training is diverse, both in topics and geographic locations (this year as far away as Corvallis, Oregon).

NPHC employees and you, our customers, benefit from our staff's participation in events such as the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Pacific Northwest Chapter Conference; Aerial Rescue Training and Competition; ISA Tree Risk Assessment Certification; The Western Forestry and Conservation Association—Forest Insect and Disease Management Conference; and the annual Turf, Tree and Landscape Conference in Coeur d'Alene. All of these opportunities increase our scientific knowledge of tree care as well as safe, professional work practices you have come to know and expect.

As our customers, you can be sure you are working with the most technically advanced and up to date arboricultural company in the region. NPHC typically represents the largest, and sometimes the only, attendance of local, commercial arborists at many of these training conferences because we feel education is so important.

As a company we are very committed to offering continuing education opportunities for our staff throughout their career in order to develop, maintain, and attract the most qualified individuals available.

Keep warm, enjoy spending time with loved ones, and we'll see you soon.

In care of trees,

President

Winter 2008

Mark Your Calendars!

Turf, Tree, and Landscape Conference

Workshops on a variety of landscape topics.
February 7 & 8
Coeur d'Alene Resort
Info: <http://capps.wsu.edu/conferences/TTLIC/>

30th Annual Home & Yard Show

Feb. 28 & 29, 12-9pm
March 1, 10am-8pm
March 2, 10am-5pm
Spokane Fairgrounds
Info: www.custershows.com/home_yard/details.htm

WSU County Extension Beginning Gardening

March 22 & 29, 10am-12noon
April 5 & 12, 10am-12noon
A series of four classes that teaches the very basics of gardening. Info: call (509) 477-2181, or email mastergardener@spokanecounty.org

To Do Now

- 15% off winter pruning and removals.
- Water evergreens under overhangs to prevent winter drought.
- Winter is the time to look at landscape design changes for the coming year. Call us if you'd like to discuss changes you are considering.

A Cool Crowd

Last month we shared information about the Community Gardens of Spokane that we'd like to correct. The Second Harvest program has been discontinued, but other programs are taking shape. According to Pat Munts, the program's coordinator, "We're working to establish policies within the city, and get neighborhood councils involved. We also have workshops planned on how to get gardens started." Seattle and Missoula offer good program models. Grants help fray some of the start-up costs. If you'd like to learn more, email info@spokanegardens.com or go to www.spokanegardens.com/.

All Trees Fail ~ Eventually

"All trees fail all the time" — eventually. No, we're not trying to scare anyone; this expression is the mantra of the tree risk assessor. We do not consider any tree 100% safe because there is no such thing. There are however, things we can see on the outside of a tree that give us clues to determine the safety factors for any given tree. We can often prevent or mitigate unsafe factors by practicing good plant health care.

Many of the things tree risk assessors look for may not be visible to the lay



Red Oak - codominant stem failure

©2007 Courtesy of Julian Dunster Photography

person—their advanced training goes beyond the basics of arboriculture and includes a more detailed understanding of the biology of trees. Assessors evaluate many aspects of the tree's overall health. They look for much more than the potential damage a given tree can cause to a structure.

Above ground we are checking for: whether the canopy of the tree is dense or thin, the color of the foliage, existence of cankers, are there broken limbs, co-dominant stems, included bark, cause of leaning, and overall growth pattern of the tree. At the ground level, and below ground, we will: evaluate the planting depth, look for ground or root upheavals, the presence of mushrooms around the tree, as well as any indications of root or buttress rot.

Northwest Plant Health Care is proud to have two I.S.A. Certified Tree Risk Assessors—Ben Kappen and Thorin Brown. They are two of only four in this region that are not municipal employees.

The winter months are a great time to assess your trees and their potential

to be hazardous. During these months, trees have a higher possibility of failure and should be assessed. We can schedule a tree risk assessment to determine if there is a problem or if it can be mitigated with pruning. In some cases, removal might be the safest or best option. Either way, our qualified staff is there to help you make an informed decision.

If you think there is a risk or hazard in one or more of your trees, please contact us and we'll have one of our tree risk assessors out to perform this service for you. The cost of an assessment is well worth your peace of mind.

~Thorin Brown



~by Forest

Carne Guisada (Meat Stew)

Perfect for Winter!

Serves 6 people

- 1 1/2 lbs sirloin steak, cubed
- 2 Tbsp. cooking oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1/2 green bell pepper, diced
- 14 oz. can diced tomato & jalapeno
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 cup water
- 3 medium red potatoes, cubed
- 1/2 Tbsp. Salt
- 1/4 tsp. pepper
- 1/2 Tbsp. ground cumin

In a skillet, sauté beef, onion, bell pepper, and garlic until the meat is brown and the onion is tender. Cook potatoes in boiling water until soft (about 8 minutes), then drain. Add the tomatoes, water, cumin, potatoes, salt, and pepper to the meat mixture. Cover and simmer on low heat for 30 minutes.

Serve with warm flour tortillas. Garnish with either some cubed avocado or a mix of onion, Serrano peppers, and cilantro—finely diced.

Thanks to "The Dog," A.J. Garza (Kate's brother-in-law), for this authentic Mexican recipe.

"Ask the Tree Care Experts"

Q: I've seen a lot of people spreading de-icing salts on their driveways. Does this do any damage to plants?

A: Yes, de-icing salts can adversely affect plants. Salts deposited on the surface of twigs, branches, and evergreen leaves can cause excessive drying of their foliage and roots. The salts can be taken up (absorbed) by the plants, which can accumulate to toxic levels. This toxicity could cause a nutritional imbalance by affecting soil chemistry and could directly harm beneficial microbes. The effects of excessive salt absorption on buds, leaves, and soft twigs may be evident sooner than the effects of accumulation in the soil, which can take months.

"Thank you for doing such a great job pruning my Maple and Elm trees. The guys were very professional and conscientious. I would recommend your services to anyone."

~G. F., Post Falls, ID

Q: You've mentioned neighborhood programs in the past—how do I get my neighborhood involved in a community pruning project?

A: Often several people in your neighborhood may be interested in doing this. With our discounted winter pricing, you can provide one-page flyers to residents that shows pricing for pruning the trees on their property if done in a collaborative effort. You can also get people involved in a neighborhood clean up, either through a newsletter or door-to-door flyer.

A clean-up effort helps them become aware of the benefits of pruning as a community effort, and the opportunity to prune many trees at a significantly reduced rate. Add some hot chocolate and a few brats on the grill, and not only do you get your trees pruned, you get a chance to relieve some cabin fever. And who knows, you may even meet a new neighbor or make a new friend. Give us a call and we'll help you get the ball rolling.



Who's Hot!

VIC WILLIS... is a committed employee. He's well-liked at NPHC— easy to be around and fun to talk to. He joined NPHC in March of 2005 and says he likes working for the company mainly because he really likes the people he works with. Vic also appreciates that he can explore new ways of doing things and values the emphasis on continued education.

As many of you already know, Vic is an accomplished chef; in fact, some of his recipes have been highlighted in this newsletter. Vic worked and trained as a chef while getting his degree in Horticulture at Spokane Community College. Vic is a Certified Arborist and is the Landscape Crew Foreman at NPHC. He also does sprinkler repair. This winter he is studying for the Pesticide Licensing Exam so he can help the Plant Health Care (PHC) crew in the spring and summer of this year.

What's Not!

Snow Loads on Trees...

Accumulation of snow on trees and/or shrubs can cause branches to bend and potentially break. This is typically more common in March, after a winter of steady snow fall, but can occur any time if we get a mixture of rain and freezing temperatures. During any of these conditions, snow builds up on the branches, then melts a little, then freezes to ice. Since ice is heavier than snow, branches can break.

Evergreens tend to have the most damage since they don't lose their foliage. This enables snow to build up on them quicker than on deciduous trees. However, weak wooded trees can also be susceptible to breakage from snow loads simply because the wood is not strong enough to support the additional weight. Silver and Japanese Maples, Black Locust, Willow, and Birch are all examples of weak wooded trees.

If snow starts building up on your trees, don't hesitate to give them a gentle shake before the freezing process starts. You can also brush off the snow with a small broom.

Northwest Plant Health Care, Inc.



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Pruning Fruit Trees

Historically, Spokane was surrounded by apple orchards stretching for miles. Excluding peach and apricot, it should be no surprise that many types of fruit trees thrive in this area—summers provide long days for fruit maturation; early frosts help sweeten the fruit; and cold winters make it difficult for some pests to survive.

When thinking about pruning fruit trees, you must determine the purpose of a given tree in the landscape. If the main objective is to have a tree that's aesthetically pleasing, the arborist working on the tree will focus on ornamental pruning (shaping the tree) rather than training the tree for fruit production. If production of fruit is the primary objective, more time will be spent on developing a strong, solid structure that will support the weight of the fruit.

The first step in pruning any type of fruit tree is removing diseased, dying, or dead wood. Removal of infected

wood (whether it's fungal, bacterial or pest related) will ensure that the problems do not spread throughout the tree. When dealing with diseased wood, it is necessary to sterilize pruning tools with rubbing alcohol or bleach to reduce the likelihood of transmitting the infection from one cut to another, or from one tree to another.

If you'd like to train a tree for fruit production, you must allow the growth of a single, upright trunk and be sure the tree has well-spaced side branches. A tree with a central leader is less susceptible to broken limbs than a tree with an open center, and it still allows light penetration for the formation of flowers. Properly trained trees will yield higher quality fruit much sooner and will live longer than those that are not trained and perhaps even neglected.

Another aspect of fruit tree pruning is to thin overly abundant fruiting spurs (short twigs that bear the fruit).

Removing these extra spurs allows more light and air to reach the branches. It is also necessary to thin excessive fruit (fruit crowding each other)—this allows the remaining fruit to grow larger, and will reduce the overall weight of the branches therefore alleviating the risk of large breaks. Limb breakage significantly inhibits the productivity of the tree and may greatly reduce its life span.

It is imperative that you start training fruit trees

at a young age, and whatever style of pruning is desired, as a general rule, pruning of fruit trees is most often done during the dormant season.

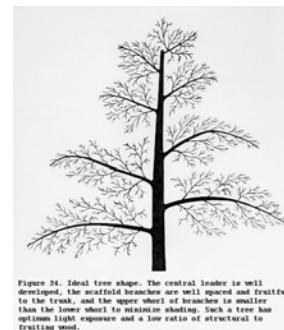


Figure 24. Ideal tree shape. The central leader is well developed, the scaffold branches are well spaced and fruitful to the trunk, and the upper whorl of branches is smaller than the lower whorl to minimize shading. Such a tree has optimum light exposure and a low ratio of structural to fruiting wood.

~Ben Larson