

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Where can I get a soil test done?

A: Washington State University does not offer a soil testing service. However, the following link will give you a listing of commercial labs that do soil testing in the PacNW.

<http://wsprs.wsu.edu/AnalyticalLabsEB1578E.pdf>

You might also want to check your Yellow Pages directory to find a local one.

Q: I have bugs in my house/garden? What are they and how can I prevent them?

A: It is virtually impossible to positively identify a bug without seeing it. Insects, spiders, etc. are everywhere and the overwhelming majority of them are not harmful to homes, gardens, or people. Please call the Master Gardeners' office at (360) 676-6736 and make an appointment to bring in a specimen. For more information on dealing with indoor and outdoor insects use the following links:

<http://pep.wsu.edu/pestsense/>

<http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense/>

Q: How do I get rid of moles?

A: Washington State University provides the following advice regarding moles:

The mole is here to stay. Extermination is impractical. The very nature of its food habits makes it hard to poison, even if poisoning methods around gardens, lawns, and home premises were really desirable. Fumigants include gas cartridges, tablets, and pellets. Fumigation with lethal gases is sometimes successful against the mole in moist, compact, clay soils. More often it is a waste of time trying to fill the porous soil of the intricate and connecting runway systems with the deadly fumes.

The use of deterrents, obnoxious substances placed in the mole runs, has the local and temporary advantage of driving the animal elsewhere to find new hunting grounds. This may indeed serve the purposes of the keeper of the home premises or of the kitchen gardener.

Other control methods that may have individual application include digging out mole nests and stunning individual moles. Moles are sensitive to concussion. Smacking a shovel on the ground near a mole may stun or kill it. Unless most of a population of moles is taken, no residual control is effective.

A cat or dog that is a good hunter can do an excellent job of keeping the mole population in check. The only other sure method is trapping. The right trap is essential. Unfortunately, all of the effective mole traps were

outlawed for general use in Washington State. One can still legally purchase these traps but may not use them for capturing animals.

Sonic and vibration devices have not been proven effective.

Q: How do I rid my lawn of moss?

A: Washington State University provides the following advice regarding moss:

Maintaining a vigorous lawn is the most effective control against the establishment of a moss infestation. The presence of moss in turf is generally reflective of one or a combination of the following conditions: low soil fertility, too much shade, improper watering practices, grass diseases, and poorly drained or compacted soils. To permanently rid or control moss in a turf situation, eliminate the conditions favoring the moss growth.

Lack of fertility is the most common cause for the growth of moss. Regular fertilizing will help to develop a healthy, vigorous turf. Some commercial turf fertilizers have a moss control agent in them, such as ferrous ammonium sulfate.

Moss is a shallow "rooted" plant. Any practices that restrict deep grass root penetration will favor moss development. Infrequent, heavy irrigations will encourage deeper grass root development and will dry the surface moss roots. If soil water movement is hampered by accumulations of thatch or mats of old clippings on the surface, renovation of the surface with power rakes or vertical mowers will promote a stronger grass growth. The moss may be raked out during this process. Reseed if the grass is gone and follow a regular fertilizer and watering program.

Various materials are available to kill moss in turf, and by following label directions, you may obtain good moss kill. Ammonium sulfate (ferric sulfate anhydrous) can be used to

"burn" out the moss. Grass may be damaged temporarily, but will come back rapidly with the added fertility from the ammonium sulfate. Keep ammonium sulfate off sidewalks and driveways because it may permanently stain concrete or stone. It also may cause corrosion to certain metals. It is toxic to fish. Unless the basic fault that allowed moss to enter in the first place is corrected, the control will be incomplete or only temporary.

Q: I have spiders in my house/yard? Do they bite? How can I get rid of them?

A: The best method for spider identification is to bring a specimen in to the Master Gardeners' office. Please call (360) 676-6736 for an appointment.

The following website shows photos of common spiders, their habits, and how to discourage them.

<http://pep.wsu.edu/pestsense/>

On the Pestsense Home Page there are 3 separate titles on the left selection list in which to look for spiders: Nuisance, Curiosity/Beneficial, and Stinging/Biting.

Nuisance: Look to the left and click on “Nuisance”. On the next page, look to the left list and click on “Spiders (non-biting)”

Stinging and Biting: Go back to the home menu, look to the left list, and click on “Stinging and Biting”. At the next page, look to the left and click on each spider species: Hobo, Jumping, and Widow spiders. Note: The brown recluse spider does not live in Washington.

Curiosity/Beneficial: Go back to the home menu, look at the left list, and click on “Curiosity/Beneficial”. At the next page, look to the left and click on Giant house spider.

Q: How do I care for my lawn? How high should I cut it? When should I fertilize it and how do I get rid of the weeds? What insects should I worry about?

A: Lawns have a lot of issues, as you have noted. Your location, climate, the size of your lawn and how much you wish to do or spend will help you decide what choices to make.

Publication, EB 0482, from Washington State University gives the answers to all of the questions you asked, plus how to plant or rehabilitate a lawn. You can download it at:

<http://cru.cahe.wsu.edu/CEPublications/eb0482/eb0482.pdf>

If there are insects or diseases you wish to specifically identify and resolve, this is the site to use:

<http://pep.wsu.edu/hortsense/>

Look to the left and click on “Lawn and Turf”. Click again on “Lawn and Turf”. The left hand list lists diseases and insects. Click on each to see a description and a list of non-chemical or chemical solutions.

Please call the Master Gardeners’ office at (360) 676-6736 for more help anytime.

Q: I have seen ants in my house. What are they, and how do I get rid of them?

Some ants are a nuisance and some can be living in wood and are an indicator of wood moisture problems (which need to be found and fixed. Ant identification is best made, for certain, if a specimen is brought in for examination. Please call the Master Gardeners’ office at (360) 676-6736 for an appointment. Information is also available for ant ID online from Washington State University. Here are some sites to search for answers to identification and non-chemical or chemical management.

<http://pep.wsu.edu/pestsense/>

Look to the left side menu for subject "Wood-Destroying Pests". Choose each ant listed for description and management information.

Look to the left side again for subject "Nuisance". Choose other ant choices

Q: Can you give me a list of deer-resistant plants for my yard?

A: Washington State University offers the following advice regarding deer-resistant plants for your yard,

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/html/ec/ec1440/>

Q: How do I prune my fruit trees?

A: Washington State University offers the following advice regarding pruning fruit trees:

Why Prune?

Fruit trees need pruning for two primary purposes: to establish the basic structure, and to provide light channels throughout the tree so that all the fruit can mature well. A well pruned tree is easier to maintain and to harvest, and adds esthetic value to the home garden as well, but the primary reason for pruning is to ensure good access to sunlight. Did you ever notice that the best fruit always seems to be in the top of the tree? It's true, because that's where the most light is available. Training a tree that is open to the light, and easy to care for and to harvest, is the main consideration to keep in mind when pruning, whatever system you are using.

Equipment

Most pruning can be handled with 3 tools: a hand pruner, a long-handled lopping shears, and a pruning saw. Either bypass or anvil-type pruners can be used, but a bypass-type is better for close pruning such as is necessary on young trees. Some prefer the folding saw for its handiness but non-folding types are good also. A number of accessories are useful in tree training. Either spreaders (different lengths can be made or purchased) or weights that clip to the branches can be used to bend branches to a more horizontal position, so they will begin fruiting earlier. Limbs can also be tied down using ground clips (hop clips).

Thinning and Heading

The two types of pruning cuts you can make are thinning and heading. Thinning is removing an entire shoot, branch, or limb, back to the point where it originated. Thinning cuts are the ones you should use most of the time, because they tend to open up light channels throughout the tree. Often just thinning out the limbs that are crowding or crossing over does an effective job of opening up the tree. Heading is removing part of a shoot, branch, or limb (up to 1/3 to 1/2 of its length). Heading cuts encourage growth of side branches at the point of the cut, from the part of the branch that remains. Heading should be used primarily for establishing branches in young trees. Leaders or future scaffold branches can be headed to cause laterals to branch out. In most

cases heading should be avoided, as it can result in a tree overcrowded with shoots that close off light channels and reduce productivity. When heading is necessary, such as to shorten and stiffen up a long bare branch, make the heading cut into older wood, as this results in less regrowth.

Pruning is done primarily in the dormant season (November 15–April 15), so when looking at a shoot or branch to decide whether to thin or not, try to picture the branch as it will be when full of leaves in the summer, and eliminate shoots that will be too closely spaced. Keep in mind the key phrase: When in doubt, thin it out! Make most of your cuts thinning cuts.

For more information, use the following link to download the WSU publication, “Training and Pruning Your Home Orchard.”

<http://cru84.cahe.wsu.edu/cgi-bin/pubs/PNW0400.html?id=YZ9SXMVz>

Q: The leaves on my trees (shrubs) look different. It isn't fall. What happened?

A: Leaf color and change can be due to many things and it's virtually impossible to tell what the problem is without seeing a sample. You may have iron or manganese deficiency, root problems, virus diseases, frost injury, heat damage or even powdery mildew. Please call the Master Gardeners' office at (360) 676-6736 and make an appointment to bring in a specimen.

Q: I want to landscape my yard using some trees. Is there a list of recommended ones?

A: Washington State University offers suggestions for a wide variety of trees, shrubs, and plants on the following link:

<http://gardening.wsu.edu/text/bestnw.htm#Shrubs>