

NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

February 5, 2024



Take a Quick Quiz to Benefit Your Trees

As we advance into February, yard and garden work schedules remain light, even with our mild winter. However, now is a fun time to focus on ways to help assure shade trees stay healthy and problem free. Here is a quick quiz on shade tree care essentials.

1. How close to the trunk can you dig before damaging roots?
2. Is it safe to tie wash lines, wire, or dog chains around tree trunks?
3. Do nails pounded into tree trunks cause harm?
4. How often should you fertilize shade trees?
5. When is the best time to prune a shade tree?

Questions 1 through 3 all deal with systems vital for tree growth. Walk from the trunk out to where branches end above your head – you are at the dripline. Tree roots spread from the trunk to at least the dripline and usually beyond; this is the correct answer to question one. This entire area is sensitive to damage from digging or soil fill. Construction around trees often leads to decline and death as roots are damaged.

The vascular system, which transports water and nutrients up into trees and food back to the roots, is located just under the bark. Tree trunks grow via the vascular cambium, which allows trunks to increase in girth. The answer to question 2 is no; ropes or wire left on trunks will eventually girdle the cambium, killing the tree. In contrast (question 3), nails cause minimal damage, as the cambium goes completely around the trunk and nails just make a few small holes in it, damaging a small portion.

Question 4 is a little more involved, as recommendations on fertilizing trees vary. Overfertilizing can be a problem and fertilizing is also not a cure-all for other tree problems. A practical answer to question 4 is to fertilize based on need; look at the growth rate and color of leaves when considering fertilization. If the tree looks healthy, it may be best to leave well enough alone. Oftentimes trees grow in good soil and do not need fertilizer.

Finally, question 5, when to prune trees. Tough to answer because depends on what kind of tree. Early spring is a suitable time for many trees, as new growth resumes soon, it is easy to see the branch structure when no leaves are present, and wounds tend to callus quickly. Wait until late spring for the "bleeders", like maples. I am out of space for this week but will address more on pruning here soon.



Interested in learning more about Horticulture in Iron County?
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