# The Daily Tribune News/Digging For Answers - 1/19/03

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**Fruit Questions**

We are still several months away from picking juicy, red tomatoes from the vegetable garden or tasty, ripe peaches from the tree, but that doesn't mean we can't think about it. And judging by the calls that we're getting here at the Bartow County Extension office, I'm not the only person thinking about fresh fruits and vegetables. Actually, now is a good time to do a little planing and thinking ahead of time. Here are just a few of the questions that we've received recently:

**Q.** When I was growing up on the farm my parents had muscadines. I want to plant some vines this spring and would like to know several good varieties for our area.

**A.** Muscadine varieties can be broken into four categories: two based on fruit color - black or bronze and two based on flower type - perfect flowered(pollen and fruit) and female(fruit only).

If you plan to grow only one vine, it can be black or bronze, but it must be a perfect flowered. Female(F) varieties produce no pollen, therefore they need to be inter-planted with perfect flowered(PF) varieties for proper pollination and fruit set. Several of the better varieties for the Bartow area include: Carlos(PF/bronze), Cowart(PF/black), Fry(F/bronze), Lommis(F/black), Nesbitt(PF/black), Noble(PF/black), Summit(F/bronze), Tara(PF/bronze), Triumph(PF/bronze). Scuppernong(F/bronze) is one of the older but more common varieties of muscadine. Always plant muscadines in sunny locations having moist, but well-drained soils.

**Q.** Last year nematodes were a real problem on my tomato plants. Is there anything I can do this year to prevent nematodes?

**A.** Since all nematicides or nematode-controlling chemicals for home vegetable gardens have been taken off the market, vegetable gardeners must now resort to other control measures. *First*, when purchasing tomato plants next year, look on the tags to see if those particular plants are 'nematode resistant' or tolerant. Tomato varieties that are nematode tolerant will be tagged 'VFN'. These tags or plant labels are usually placed in the cell packs of plants or in the individual pots. The "N" in VFN means that these particular varieties are resistant or more tolerant to nematodes. *Second*, try to plant your tomato plants in a different location in the garden than where they were planted last year. Relocating them to a new area may lessen the chances of nematode attack. *Thirdly*, you may wish to turn or rototill the your vegetable garden this month or next month while temperatures are cold. Tilling or turning the soil in winter exposes nematodes to frigid temperatures and cold winds that may greatly reduce the numbers of nematodes in your garden.

In cases where nematode populations have become extreme, it may be necessary to solarize your garden soil by placing a plastic tarp over the ground for a season to starve nematodes. The old belief of planting a few marigolds near your tomato plants to ward off nematodes will not work. Planting an entire area of the garden in a solid cover of marigold plants will reduce nematodes.

**Q.** Last year the tip of almost every branch on my apple tree turned black and died. It looked like the leaves had actually been burned with a flame. What is this and what can I do to stop it?

**A.** Your problem sounds like fireblight - a bacterial disease that infects and kills the tips of branches on not only apple trees, but pears, cherries and plums, too. Prune out infected branches as soon as you notice the disease and be sure to dip your pruners in alcohol after each and every cut to prevent spreading the disease. Remove and destroy infected limbs as quickly as possible.

**Q.** I read somewhere that this is the correct time to prune muscadines, grapes and apple trees. Is this true or should I wait until my plants leaf out?

**A.** Actually this is the perfect time to prune muscadine and grape plants. By pruning now there should be very little sap flow or ‘bleeding of the vines.’ However, the best time to prune apple trees, as well as, other fruit trees like peaches, pears and plums is late February to mid March.

Contact our office for brochures on how to correctly prune muscadines, grapes and fruit trees or go to the University of Georgia Extension Service website at www.ces.uga.edu. and click on the publications tab. Extensive information is available at that site concerning pruning fruit plants.

### **Q.** Should I take some extra steps to protect my fruit trees during the winter months?

**A.** Most established fruit plants will not need extra protection during the winter here in the Bartow County area as our winters are normally not severe enough to cause severe damage.

### Mulching the soil is usually sufficient. Wrapping the trunks of young fruit trees may be helpful on recently planted or young fruit trees to help prevent sunscald, windburn, winter drying, animal damage and mechanical injury. Some tender fruit plants plants such as figs, persimmons, kiwi or pomegranates may require additional protection by mounding the soil up and around the trunk to 12 inches or so, especially during their first few years if winter temperatures are expected to dip into the teens or single digits. Wrapping with straw or burlap is also effective.

Small fruit plants such as strawberries, blueberries, blackberries and raspberries should be completely mulched over during their first winter with a light, loose hay or pine straw to prevent alternate freezing and thawing of the soil, which might “heave” the plants out of the ground. But do remember to remove this extra protective cover at the first sign of growth in early spring.

For more information on fruit trees and vegetable gardening, contact the Bartow County Extension office at 770-387-5142 or uge1015@arches.uga.edu.