Week of January 30, 2000

**Fruit Trees, Our Orchard Children**

Willie Chance

Fruit trees are like children. They do not ask for attention - they demand it. We ignore them at our hazard. Lack of attention leads to disaster.

Of course, the problems are much more serious when we neglect children. We are experiencing many of them now in the U.S. Similar but less dire consequences await those who ignore their orchard plants.

Like children, some plants have a short attention span. They require constant vigilance to do well. Children like this are often very sweet when properly cared for - but they need constant supervision.

Certain fruits are like this, also. They include peaches, apples and maybe plums. If you want to grow these fruits, you must plan to prune and spray them. Insects and diseases can be very bad with these fruits. Plan to spray every two weeks or so if you buy one of these.

“Well,” you say “I never have to do that with my peach, plum or apple.” Congratulations! But many gardeners have problems with these plants. Why plant problems?

Fruits that are less troublesome include blueberry, blackberry, Oriental persimmon and pear. These orchard children require less (or no) spraying. However, there are some basic things all fruits need.

Select a well-drained site receiving at least six to eight hours of sun a day. Morning sun is best. Avoid low areas where water sits during rains and cold air settles during frosts. Dig very wide planting holes and plant no deeper than the plants originally grew.

Always plant recommended varieties. Others may not do well. People call me after the fact and want me to ‘save their fruit tree’. If they plant the wrong variety, I cannot help them. You must start right to get a good result. Call us for a list of varieties.

The same is true for pruning. For apples, pears, peaches, muscadine and grapes - it must be done properly every year. If not, the tree will often become a tangled mess. Like a child left to itself, they are very hard to rehabilitate. Prune these fruits every year.

Peaches are pruned to an open vase shape, while apple pruners use a modified leader system. For an explanation of these methods, call for our brochures. I cannot come out and show you how, but the leaflets may help.

You can also propagate certain fruits at this time of year - especially pear, peach, plum and figs. Call for more details.

Children and fruit trees require constant care, but the results can be rewarding. As with kids, it is better to plan not to have fruits at all, if you will not care for them. I do not know much about raising kids, but for more details on raising fruit, contact the Houston County Extension Service. See our website at www.griffin.peachnet.edu/ga/houston or E-mail us at uge2153b@uga.edu or call us at 542-2020.