**Week of January 26, 1998**

**PEST-FREE FRUITS**

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 **Houston County Extension Agent**

**I have been writing a lot about preventing problems. The older I get, the more I**

**learn to prevent rather than to cure problems. Now that I know this, if I can just do it!**

**Preventing problems works well on home orchard fruits. Once a pest has moved**

**in, he is hard to evict. You can however keep him from making your orchard his home.**

**Consider the average pest. He likes warm temperatures, plenty of food and avoids**

**rain, snow and sleet. (Sounds like me!) So where does he go in the winter? He cannot**

**afford a winter home in Florida. He hides in old fruit on the tree or ground, under cracks**

**in the bark or on the small limbs of the tree. What can you do to eject these home orchard**

**squatters?**

**Prune out the pests. Fruits should be pruned now to remove excess wood, reduce**

**number of fruits, to shape the tree and to remove diseases and insects. For specifics on**

**fruit pruning, call us for a brochure. To remove pests, prune out scabby or rough looking**

**wood, old fruits in the tree and limbs with cracked, peeling or warty bark. Remove all**

**dead wood. Remove or destroy all prunings.**

**Pick up old fruits around trees and throw them away. They may be a fruit pest**

**hideout. Keep weeds and grass killed around the tree. They may harbor bugs. Mulch**

**trees to prevent weeds and conserve moisture.**

**Some pests may live on the main trunk. They cannot be pruned out. Spray twice**

**with a dormant oil to smother insects and mites hiding in cracks and crevices on the bark.**

**A lime-sulfur spray can be used to destroy fungus diseases left in the tree from last year.**

**Use these sprays before the trees bud out.**

**Many fruits must be sprayed during the season to produce well. Peaches are**

**especially prone to problems. Fruit can look good up until harvest and then rot. For best**

**results peaches (and plums and apples) should be sprayed every two weeks or so. However,**

**this takes a lot of work and expense. If you were to spray the minimum, what would you do?**

**Our pathologists (that’s our big word for ‘disease experts’) suggest that the most**

**important sprays are the first three. Start about the time the petals fall and spray three**

**times with a home orchard or home fruit tree spray. You can buy this at a local garden**

**center. This will not stop all pests but will increase chances of beating the bugs to the fruit.**

**There are some traps available that lure insect pests. They contain a chemical called**

**a pheromone which smells like another insect - often one of the opposite sex. Growers and**

**scientists use these to watch for the presence of insects and to monitor their numbers.**

**Can we use these to catch all insects in an area and to spare our trees? Well,**

**consider that the trap attracts bugs from a long distance. Also, it may only trap some of**

**the insects. In the long run, these traps may actually bring in more pests than they**

**capture. Save the traps for the farmer and stick to practices that work. Two traps that do**

**work are the pecan weevil and peach and plum curculio traps. Call us for information!**

 **If you are planting fruits, pick varieties recommended for our area. Call our office**

**for a list. Some fruits (peaches and apples) probably need constant spraying to**

**consistently yield. Other fruits like blueberry, persimmon, muscadine, blackberry, fig and**

**pear may never need sprays. Personally, I had two peach trees in my back yard and I**

**pruned them severely - with an axe! I prefer to grow low maintenance plants - even in the**

**fruit orchard.**

**Avoid problems later with care now. Call or come by for more details,**

**987-2028 or 542-2020.**

**Looking for a good opportunity to see the latest in beautiful plants and flowers?**

**The Master Gardeners are sponsoring a day trip to the Southeastern Flower Show in**

**Atlanta, February 19. Cost is $20.00 and covers transportation to and from the event,**

**snacks and a ticket into the Show. For more information or to register call Phylis at 929-**

**2733 or the Extension Office.**