

# Fruit tree maintenance and care workshop

Sunday first of May 2022

Guest presenter Marcus Ragus, head horticulturalist at Spring Bay Mill Gardens

About 40 people, both TNG members and people from the community turned up for this free workshop held at Tarooma Neighbourhood Gardens.

We started with some general discussion about gardening.

## Carbon, biodiversity and interplanting

Marcus said that it is important to put the carbon back into the soil, by chopping up all of the harvest waste (ie vegetable plant tops, stalks etc) and burying it under mulch. This is what they do at Spring Bay Mill. He advocates using local hay as mulch – consideration of the mileage. Heavy mulching can defeat even rope twitch if consistently re-applied. Use wet newspaper as a mulch, then pile organic matter on top. Repeat layers. Can complement this with green mulch (barley, legumes etc) which will outcompete weeds like twitch over time. This method could be successful in our berry patch.

Spring Bay is a biodiverse garden where habitat is considered, particularly with interplanting of various species – vegetable and ornamentals.

Barley is the best annual grass for putting carbon back into the soil. Used at Spring Bay Mill as garden edging, over mulch, under fruit trees. Grows in all seasons and can be cut down readily. Attractive. Deep root mass, does not outcompete fruit trees. Beetle banks! (ie safe places where beneficial insects can reside). Can mix in legumes with the barley sowing.

Flowers are good for biodiversity, especially for harbouring parasitic wasps (parasitic on nuisance caterpillars)

More trees nearby (ie in the park) provide places for small birds to hide and rest so they can nip in and pick up insects.

## Pumpkin mounds

Build a mound of mulch and harvest waste, newspaper etc. At least 1.2m diameter, 0.5 m high. Allow it to sink down and sow pumpkins in the shallow middle depression. Sow a band of barley around it.

## We then started a walk around of the Long Orchard

### The Lemon Tree

Tasmania is right on the edge of the climate range for citrus trees, but Marcus was impressed by the health of the lemon. Citrus are usually yellow in Tas. Through winter – cold. The key to success is to keep it as green as possible through warmer seasons by feeding heavily in spring with pelletised manure and blood and bone. Also feed now with magnesium, dynamic lifter, blood and bone or other organic nitrogen fertilisers.

### The Peach Tree

Curly leaf: spray with a lime wash product. Make your own (recipes on internet). Or use Lime Sulphur products, also good to deter fungus. But you must use these products BEFORE bud burst. Two applications at least. If used after bud burst all of the buds and leaves will be burnt.

## Feeding fruit trees

Feed trees now with organic salts – Potassium sulphate (obtainable in bulk from Nutrien – ex-Roberts store). 60g per litre of water, dissolve it first in a little warm water. This strengthens the cells for winter. Lime or Dolomite on the ground is usually not necessary despite it being recommended often. But crusher dust (cheap from landscape supplies) is very good. Sheep or chicken manure? (question from audience). Marcus says best plan is to recycle harvest waste – mow over and return to the mulch for nutrient recycling. Wood fire ash is very alkaline-use a sprinkle only. Dusting sulphur is used to lower pH – ie reduce alkalinity.

## **The Apples**

Codling moth – Start to breed when average temperature goes above 16 degrees C. Lay flat eggs under the leaves. Heavy mulch under trees stops them reinfesting from hibernation underground. Trichogramma wasps can be bought in little packs (inexpensive) to hang in trees in late spring to control caterpillars such as codling.

Potassium bicarbonate is a cheap feed with antifungal properties for apples.

## **The Fig**

Likes to have lots of room and to spread. Mulch and feed heavily.

## **The Apricots**

Apricot No. 1: Cankers where bacteria get into wounds, but that tree still looks OK. Do not prune so heavily. Same advice for care as for peach. Prune late autumn or winter.

## **The Hops**

Marcus was impressed with the aroma from the ripe hops.

## **The Kiwi Fruit**

Tidy up female plants. Cut back now to a couple of horizontal branches, to espalier on the fence. Keep the male (a new plant) small as only a couple of male flowers are needed.

## **The Quince**

Is doing well but needs a follow-up prune. Let the leaves drop then conduct a basic clean-up when the structure can be seen. Remove crossing branches and do some tip pruning.

## **The Cherry**

Has had pear and cherry slug infestation (actually a saw-fly). Easily killed with dilute spray of dishwashing liquid. For the black aphids which curl the ends of cherry leaves try Neem Oil, which also has a beneficial anti-fungal action. The buds form in the new shoots so be careful not to remove those during pruning.

## **The Olive No 2 –**

Needs a good clean up – too dense Take out internal and weak growth and take out about one third of the crown. Tree in juvenile stage, prolific growth. Will slow down as tree matures and sets fruit.

## **The Almond**

As for the olive – clean up dense growth in the centre.

Recommended book on pruning is the Royal Horticultural Society Book “Pruning and Training – what, when and how to prune”.

## **Recap on treatment of plant diseases**

- Canker: limewash
- Brown spot & black spot: sulphur solution – apply before rain; reapply
- White mildew: Potassium bicarbonate - biological fungicide
- Pyrethrum – use only as last resort. While natural, is a systemic fungicide which will affect total tree health.
- Pear & cherry slugs: visible pattern in leaves. Treatment: dishwashing liquid, similar concentration as for dishwashing.
- Aphids: on underside of leaves. Can use Neem oil but difficult to get to aphids – needs direct contact. Best to apply treatment before leaves start curling up in spring (check underside of leaves).  
White oil: not recommended, is petroleum-based.

(Notes taken during the workshop by Deirdre and Claudia.)