

## War on Weather Pests

With warmer weather, I have started receiving questions pertaining to yard and garden care. Common questions include when to spray apple trees, if and when to apply lawn fertilizer, lawn insect control and timing of general gardening tasks.

The USU Extension Pest Lab offers a valuable service in answering many of these questions. The lab sends weekly email updates during the growing season that pertain to common landscape and garden problems. Visit <http://utahpests.usu.edu/ipm/> to subscribe to updates. Scroll to the bottom of the page and follow the hyperlinks.

Apples and pears will soon blossom. During this time, they are most susceptible to fire blight. The disease-causing bacteria usually enter the trees through openings in blossoms. From there, newly infected branches turn a burnt brown or black color and often develop a characteristic shepherd's crook shape. To prevent the disease, prune properly and do not over-fertilize. If trees appear healthy and produce sufficient amounts of fruit, consider not fertilizing. Over-fertilization and incorrect pruning stimulates excessive growth and causes trees to be highly susceptible to infection. Additionally, pruning during blossoming creates injury points where bacteria may enter. To protect trees, apply an agricultural antibiotic when they are flowering and follow label instructions accordingly. Agricultural antibiotics may need to be reapplied after precipitation. Once an infection has occurred, the only way to remove it is through pruning. Branches should be removed 6 inches to a foot below the point where infection is visible. Pruners should be sterilized after every cut using a 10 percent bleach solution, spray disinfectant or rubbing alcohol. Rubbing alcohol seems to be less corrosive to metal parts. For detailed information, see the USU Extension fact sheet entitled Fire Blight at: <http://extension.usu.edu/cache/files/uploads/fire-blight-08.pdf>.

Fertilizing lawns properly can be very confusing. Factors to consider are determining what nutrients the turf needs and how much traffic the lawn receives. Utah soils often have sufficient nutrients with the exception of nitrogen. Having a simple soil test performed by USU is inexpensive and can save money. Generally, fertilizers containing nitrogen only are less expensive than complete blends. For more information on soil testing, visit the USU analytical lab website at: <http://www.usual.usu.edu/>.

The way the lawn is used dictates how much fertilizer should be applied. If a lawn receives only light traffic, one or two applications will be sufficient. For lawns that receive heavier traffic, three or four applications may be necessary. For more information on lawn care, access the fact sheet: <http://extension.usu.edu/files/factsheets/care.pdf>.

Lawn-feeding insects can be another difficult problem for gardeners. The insects often prefer grass that is over fertilized and improperly mowed. For lawns with past infestations, it may be necessary to treat proactively. Preventative chemicals available to homeowners include halofenozide and imidacloprid. In Cache Valley, these should be applied in early-to-mid May. A second application is often needed in July. Lawn professionals have many other treatment options available. Diane Alston, USU pest lab director, created an online presentation detailing lawn pests. It can be found at: <http://utahpests.usu.edu/ipm/files/uploads/PPTDocs/09sh-insects-turf.pdf>.