

February 14, 2014

AGRIVIEW

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Muddy water is often a problem in East Texas farm ponds because it inhibits the growth of natural fish foods and is not aesthetically pleasing. In addition, the reduced visibility in muddy ponds limits the ability of sight-feeding predators, such as large mouth bass, to feed on forage populations effectively.

The first step in clearing ponds is to inspect the watershed and shoreline for signs of erosion. Grass sod should be established on bare areas. Rocks or other rip-rap material should be placed on shorelines of larger ponds if eroded by wave action.

Many ponds become temporarily muddy following heavy rains, but clearing usually occurs in a few days. Abundant bullhead catfish and/or common carp populations may also cause muddy conditions and should be eliminated.

If heavy rainfall or undesirable fish are not causing muddy conditions, the cause is negatively charged clay particles causing coagulation and precipitation of clay particles.

A good compound recommended for clearing ponds is agricultural limestone.

Early spring is a good time to start a management program for ponds and small lakes. If managed correctly, these ponds or lakes can be a source of recreation and food for your family. Lets look at some management tips to get started.

The first area to look at managing a farm pond is to know the pH in the water. Liming is a critical step that is often overlooked by landowners. Just like pastures, ponds have an optimum pH level that enhances fish growth by keeping the food chain in balance. When pH dips below 20 parts per million, it is time to lime. Ponds in East Texas should be tested just like you test a hay meadow. It is very important to test before you begin a stocking program.

Late winter to early spring is the best time to lime a pond. The Henderson County Extension Office can analyze the alkalinity & pH on pond water. You need to call ahead to make sure we are available to run the water sample before you bring it by.

What lime source is needed? Agricultural limestone just like is used in pastures and hay fields is an adequate material for correcting water pH. DO NOT use hydrated lime as it can change the pH too quickly and cause a fish kill.

STILL TIME TO GET FRUIT TREES PRUNED:

We are nearing mid February and it is time to prune most fruit trees in East Texas. Hopefully, the coldest part of winter is over, and the trees will soon be growing and healing pruning injuries.

Pruning fruit trees can be beneficial in several ways. Some of the advantages include: improving tree health by removing dead, injured or diseased limbs, improving ease of harvesting by shaping and reducing tree height and increasing flower production on trees such as peaches that bloom on new growth. It also improves fruit quality by allowing more light penetration, which improves fruit color and by thinning the fruit crop which improves fruit size and sugar content.

I recommend lopping shears as a basic tool. They can cut wood from 1/4 inch to 1½ inches diameter. The long handles enable someone standing on the ground to prune limbs up to an 8-foot height. The long handles also allow extra leverage when cutting larger limbs. Frequently no other equipment is needed.

You may also want to get some hand pruners because they are very useful on small plants or when a lot of small limbs less than ½ inch in diameter must be cut. The short handles give more control when doing detailed pruning. A pruning saw is needed for pruning limbs too large for the lopping shears.

The first step in pruning is to remove any dead, broken or diseased branches. Branches should be cut back to the connection to another branch. There is generally a ridge or area of wrinkled wood around the base of the branch. This is called the branch collar. The collar has the ability to heal nearby wounds and should not be cut. The limb should be cut just outside the collar. The branch collar will then quickly grow over the cut surface. Do not leave a stub sticking out of the collar. The collar will not be able to grow over the cut surface, and the stub frequently will die. This will sometimes lead to a hollow in the tree.

Next, remove branches that grow toward the center of the tree. These branches will often cross other limbs and cause rubbing injury. These limbs also will prevent light penetration and air circulation, which reduce fruit coloring and encourage diseases. Limbs of equal size that form a sharp V will tend to split apart. One of the limbs should be removed before the limbs get very large.

Limb growth can be directed by pruning back to a bud or shoot that is pointing toward the direction that growth is desired. This procedure allows the tree to be shaped or

to fill in gaps in the tree structure.

Different methods of pruning are used on different fruit species. Peach, nectarine and Japanese plums produce fruit on one-year-old wood. Because pruning stimulates growth, it is the best means available to assure an annual supply of this essential fruiting wood. Japanese plums also produce fruit on spurs and should not be pruned as much as peaches.

Peaches and nectarines are typically pruned to a three-limb open center form. This method allows sunlight into the tree and enables the fruit to develop proper color. The upper shoots can be tipped to keep trees low enough that the fruit can be harvested without the aid of ladders. Failure to control tree height will cause the lower branches to be shaded out and the fruiting wood to be too high to harvest without ladders.

Apple and pear trees produce fruit on short spurs that last 10 to 15 years. Excessive pruning will remove the fruiting spurs and reduce crop size. It will also cause excessive non-spur producing wood to be produced, which is non-productive. Apple and pear trees are normally trained to a central leader or modified central leader system. Pruning basically consists of thinning out thick areas and removing weak or damaged wood. Excessive pruning can make the trees prone to the fire blight disease.

Figs produce fruit on current season wood, although some varieties will produce an early crop on previous season's growth. Figs do not need heavy pruning to produce fruiting wood. Pruning consists primarily of removing inward growth when necessary to keep the tree open. Dead, diseased or damaged wood along with suckers and water sprouts should be removed.

IMPORTANT DATES:

- February 22nd - Virtual 4-H Youth Bass Tournament. \$25 to join 4-H and a one-time fee of \$10 for all spring fishing events. Questions contact Brock Fry 903-665-2421 or visit our website henderson.agrilife.org.
- February 25th-26th - East Texas Beef Cattle Shortcourse. 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Corazon-Pitchford Sale Facility, Athens. Day 1 \$15, Day 2 \$40, Both days \$45. Breakfast and lunch will be served. 1 CEU offered for Day 1. Register by February 18th. For more info call 903-675-6130

QUESTION OF THE WEEK:

- Q.** What causes my bulb onions to send up flower stalks?
- A.** Flowering of onions can be caused by several things, usually temperature fluctuation. An onion is classified as a biennial which means it usually takes two years to go from seed to seed. However, this condition is triggered by temperature. If an onion plant is exposed in alternating cold and warm temperatures resulting in the plant going dormant, resuming growth, going dormant and then resuming growth again, the bulbs prematurely flower or bolt.

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