



Alamosa Receives CTC Grant & Fruit Tree Pruning

by Marilyn Loser

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Colorado Tree Coalition (CTC) grant: Alamosa received another CTC grant through the efforts of the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Tree Board. Yahoo! A tree inventory of park trees and street trees (those between sidewalks and curbs) will be conducted with the grant money. Funds from the City of Alamosa will provide more than enough to match the grant funds.

City funds will provide 16-18 trees. Locations will be determined based on the inventory. We're hoping to plant the trees with the assistance of citizens during the 2015 Alamosa Arbor Week -- Tuesday, April 14, through Monday, April 20. Mark your Calendars!

The last full tree inventory was conducted in 1995. In 2008 -2009 I conducted a partial inventory and found just under 600 street trees (in the area from the river west to Adams State and from Main north to the river) and 480 park trees. Since then, more trees have been planted and many have been cut down.

You may be wondering why a tree inventory is important. An inventory provides the basis for the development of a comprehensive community forestry management plan. It can help us determine where to plant new trees, decide which trees need to be maintained to prevent potential liability, and increase our tree species diversity.

Fruit tree pruning: We don't have a lot of fruit trees in Alamosa, but for those who do have, pruning time is coming. Fruit tree pruning has different objectives and techniques than shade tree pruning.

Last week I had a call from a lady in Del Norte who has three apple trees in her yard. She purchased the property in the last couple of years and felt the 10 – 12 ft. tall trees needed pruning. I harkened back to a Fruit Tree Pruning workshop I attended in Saguache during March 2015 conducted by Colorado State Forester Vince Urbina.

Fruit trees, especially those in warmer part of the San Luis Valley, are starting to come out of dormancy but it's before budbreak (the season when dormant buds begin to open). Urbina says pruning should be done as close to budbreak as possible for three reasons: 1) it reduces winter injury to the area near pruning cuts, 2) cuts close quicker so there is less chance of disease, and 3) it reduces the likelihood of the buds below the pruning point drying out.

Tree structure is more apparent when there are no leaves. Urbina says he prefers spring pruning to fall pruning as pruning stimulates growth. You don't want that in the fall when the tree should be slowing down and preparing for winter dormancy.

I took a road trip to Del Norte armed with my Silky pruning saw and a lopper. Fortunately, she had pruning shears as many branches were quite small. It looked like someone in the past brutalized the trees by cutting off large branches. In essence, they topped the trees which left them weakened (few leaves to provide food) and prone to decay (due to the large wounds). There were lots of small branches aiming every which way and crossing over other branches.

Urbina is very careful to caution folks, "If the work is off the ground or if a chainsaw is needed, the work should be done by an International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist with insurance."

The primary objective of pruning a fruit tree is to get fruit. You want to "grow fruit, not leaves," says Urbina. This requires annual pruning. Apples and apricots mostly grow on long-lived fruit spurs.

For younger trees you want to develop tree form to support maximum crop load. For older trees you want to maintain structure and provide good light for fruit production.

So what to do? We stood back from the trees and noticed some tall lanky branches, a number of crossing branches, and lots of little spur branches. We lopped off the tall branches to heights between six and seven feet. It's easier to pick fruit and provide any maintenance, such as spraying, if you're on the ground.

We removed all dead branches, crossing branches, and most spurs. We opened up the interior of the trees by removing branches that were growing towards the center of the tree. This increases light for flower bud initiation and fruit color development. And in our area, it allows the wind to move through the tree reducing the chances of blowing it over.

The trees have fewer branches now, but they are the healthier, sturdier ones; and more light reaches all parts of the tree. We'll have to wait and see how the trees fare over the summer.

For information on pruning shade trees, please visit http://www.alamosatrees.net/at_pages/r-2011-pruning-workshop.htm.

"He was as tall as a six-foot, three-inch tree." Student writing reported by an English teacher.