



Plant Chat

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Time To Prune

As the snow melts away and spring slowly approaches, it is a good time to do some pruning on your woody plants. Now is the time to remove some disfigured branches, such as those left by black knot disease and tent caterpillars. Black knot is a fungal disease that leaves a dark-colored swelling on the branches of fruit species like plum and chokecherry. To control it, prune the infected branches 4 to 6 inches below the "knots" and destroy the pruned material. A similar technique can be used to remove



Photo of black knot by Curtis E. Swift, CSU Cooperative Extension, Grand Junction, CO

branches damaged by web worms and tent caterpillars. Late winter is also the best time to prune shoots affected by fire blight. Remember to disinfect your pruning shears and saw as you remove the infected branches. The easiest way to do this is put some rubbing alcohol in a spray bottle and use this to protect the blade after each cut. Don't use bleach as it is very caustic.

Mike Knudson, Forester, Plant Materials Center

Sweating Nursery Stock

Tree species such as hackberry, oak, and hawthorn exhibit deep bud dormancy and may fail to break bud after planting or have delayed bud break. This problem can be overcome by sweating the nursery stock.

Sweating nursery stock should be done inside a building and out of direct sunlight. Put a sheet of plastic on the floor and cover the plastic with a layer of wet, moisture retentive material such as sphagnum moss or shingle-tow. Repeat layers of trees and moisture holding material as needed. Cover with plastic and maintain temperatures of 50 to 70 degrees F. In this warm, moist environment, bud swell should begin in 5 to 10 days. Stock can be planted outside when similar temperatures exist at the planting site. Do not sweat stock to bud break, and then plant in conditions of sub-freezing temperatures or extremely dry soil conditions. For sweating to be successful, proper conditions of temperature, humidity, and soil moisture must be present at the planting site.

Other species such as ash and amur maple stored for long periods also benefit from sweating prior to planting.

Greg Morgenson, Manager, Lincoln-Oakes Nursery

Native Seed Market Update

Prices are generally down from last year, but the native seed market appears to be moving rather slowly right now, primarily because of the delayed farm bill. Prices are all over the board for some species. I recently received quotes for certified big bluestem which varied from \$5 to \$14/lb. Supplies of big bluestem appear to be in good abundance and I believe the trend will be downward but many sellers are waiting for new farm bill information. Average native seed prices per PLS pound obtained in January 2002 from various North Dakota vendors include the following (percent change from last year is in parentheses):

big bluestem \$8.50 (-39%); **blue grama** \$13.00 (0%); **Canada wildrye** \$6.30 (42%); **green needlegrass** \$7.50 (-37%); **Indiangrass** \$12.65 (-16%); **little bluestem** \$15.60 (-20%); **prairie sandreed** \$13.00 (-28%); **sand bluestem** \$13.40 (-28%); **sideoats grama** \$12.15 (-11%); **slender wheatgrass** \$1.15 (-23%); **switchgrass** \$2.50 (0%); **western wheatgrass** \$3.05 (-34%). Canada wildrye is being more widely used and showed a significant price increase. We are picking up new growers for Red River prairie



Red River germplasm prairie cordgrass

cordgrass and commercial supplies should be improving. The price has varied from around \$50 to \$60/lb the last couple years. The more commonly used native forbs and legumes also dropped in price from last year.

Purple prairieclover, Maximilian sunflower, yellow coneflower, purple coneflower, and black-eyed susan all came down about 10 to 20 percent and are in the \$15 to \$25/lb range. Native seed sources from developed plant materials have come under fire recently, mostly for misinformed reasons. Watch for the article "Five Myths Concerning Native Grass Varieties" coming soon in the next issue of Northland News.

Dwight Tober, Plant Materials Specialist



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