

MASTER GARDENER Q&A

Cultivating Your Yard and Garden Knowledge

by Toby Day

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Q I am thinking of planting an apple orchard on my property. Does MSU have any current information about planting orchards? – Yellowstone County

A Montana State University has released a new publication entitled *Growing Fruit Trees in Montana*. It has information about implementing an orchard, as well as results from a research study on Montana fruit trees. The publication will help you determine proper site selection and preparation for your orchard, how to select cultivars, plant and maintain the trees, and select rootstock. It also shows the results of a three-year study establishing plum, pear, and apple tree orchards in 10 locations throughout Montana. The publication can be found online through MSU Extension Publications at <http://store.msuextension.org> and typing in 0222 into the search bar or by calling (406)-994-3273.

Q The deer nearly ate every plant in my garden last year. Rather than fencing them out, I am thinking of using some deer repellent sprays. Do they work? I hate to spend the money if they don't work. – Madison County

A Deer can be one of the most destructive animals to landscape plants. If you live in an area that has deer, you already understand that deer, when hungry enough, will eat just about anything – including “deer resistant” plants. There are many different techniques for keeping them away from landscape plants and gardens, but the only proven way is to put up a fence higher than they can jump, which remarkably, might need to be eight feet tall. Deer repellent sprays can be effective, but not in all situations. They are often made with products that have an awful odor or taste and even a bittering agent – not something that you would want to put on your edible plants and most are not labeled for such application. There are some repellent sprays that are labeled for food crops, but they oftentimes need to be reapplied after every rainstorm or every time you overhead water. In addition, they can be very expensive. I would still recommend using a deer fence. There are many new deer fencing products that blend into your gardening landscape and are easy to install. Try an online search and you will find some great deer fencing available.

If you are still considering repellents, the best resource I have found is from the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES.edu), *An Overview and Cost Analysis of Deer Repellents for Homeowners and Landowners*. It can be found online at <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1370/ANR-1370.pdf>



Do you have Master Gardener questions?
Send them to bssa@montana.edu,
subject: Master Gardener.

ASK STEWARD

Dear Steward,

I need my well water tested fast, what do I do?

– Turner Around-Quick

Dear Turner,

When people ask about getting a well water sample tested very quickly, it is typically for a real estate transaction for a home on a well. Whenever a water test is being conducted for drinking water, a certified drinking water lab should be used. You can find a list of Montana certified drinking water labs at the MSU Extension Water Quality website (<http://waterquality.montana.edu/>) under the 'Well Educated' well testing program link. Choose a lab and call or stop by the lab to get sample bottles, as well as paperwork and instructions for collecting and returning the sample to the analytical lab. You will need to know what you want to test for, which may be dictated by terms of a real estate transaction, but the most basic test is for bacteria and nitrate. This test will require two bottles to be filled. The bacteria sample needs to reach the lab quickly in order to be valid, possibly by mid-day on the day following collection. Be sure to inquire with the specific lab for instructions. If you are interested in testing your private well and are in less of a rush, there is information on the Well Educated testing program at the website below. Results through the Well Educated program take about two weeks but include interpretation materials that can be useful for understanding results. ■

Have a question for *Ask Steward*? Please send it to bssa@montana.edu or bigskysmallacres@montana.edu.

Q I recently had a large cottonwood tree cut down and had much of it made into wood chips. I was told that if I use the wood chips for mulch it will kill the plants in my yard. Is this true?

– Dawson County

A Before I answer the question, I should explain the word "allelopathy." Allelopathy refers to an inhibitory chemical released in the environment from one plant where it affects the development and growth of its neighboring plants. The best example of allelopathy is that of black walnut, where the walnut tree produces a chemical called "juglone" that inhibits growth of many landscape plants. However, cottonwood trees do not produce this compound. It is believed that the exudates (compounds excreted from plants) in cottonwood trees that are slightly allelopathic are from the roots and not from the above ground stems, branches or trunks. If you are concerned, wait a year to put the chips on the landscape plants. By then, there should no longer be any allelopathic residuals.

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