Have you been disappointed that after several years you still haven’t had any fruit from your trees? Have you done everything right; planted correctly, pruned, fertilized and just pampered them? Well, it might not be anything you have done or not done. Bearing fruit can be a tough process and there are many factors that can influence whether you are going to be eating fresh homegrown fruit this summer.

First are your trees old enough? The new tree planted last year will still be too young to produce—it may still be just growing. After planting, trees should be 2 to 7 years old before the trees are strong enough to carry fruit through the season. For example, apples and apricots can take between 2 and 5 years to produce, while peaches take between 2 and 4 years. Cherries are slow-growers and can take from 3 to 7 years for the first good crop. Pears also take a long-time, between 4 and 6 years. Dwarf trees will take significantly less time.

A major factor in this county can be weather. Trees need a certain amount of cold weather. “Chill hours” is the amount of time that the tree requires of cold weather below 45°F. Cold weather influences dormancy and promotes spring growth. Without this chill time, the tree will fail to do well; spring growth may be delayed, irregular and slow. This can extend the blooming period and increase the possibility of frost injury. Did you buy a tree suited to our warmer climate? The variety that you had in your orchard in Wisconsin that you loved may not do well in this warmer climate.

The last cold spell can also cause the loss of fruit. Those wonderful warm early spring days encourage the trees to bloom and then WHAM!!, it freezes. These frosts can affect both the flowers and young fruit. Exposed buds can usually withstand temperatures to 24°F. Open blossoms will be killed if the temperature drops below 27°F. Covering the trees can be an effective way to keep the flowers from damage when temperatures drop. Rather than looking at when the fruit ripens as most catalogs and nurseries’ talk about, it is probably more important to find out if it is an early or late bloomer. The later it blooms, the better chance it has of missing the late frosts. Cold weather also inhibits pollination. Insects are often absent at the time the tree blooms.

Pollination may also be a problem if the tree requires cross-pollination. With some trees like pecans, a cross-pollinator is required.
because the tree produces the female flowers and pollen at different times. (Pecans are wind pollinated.) Two different types of trees are required so that pollen and flowers are available at the same time. Having a cross pollinator can also improve the number of fruit that sets. Apples, almonds, pecans, sweet cherries, pears and plums will have improved fruit sets with cross-pollinators.

Some trees produce biennially. That is, there will be a good crop of fruit one season, not so good the next. This is biologically programmed into some trees and there is little that can be done about it. The mechanism is a way for the tree to recover from the previous year’s stress of producing a large quantity of fruit. It can be minimized in some cases by taking good care of the tree and thinning the fruit in the years it produces a large crop. About 30 to 40 leaves are needed for each piece of fruit produced.

The Cooperative Extension has a bulletin about fruit tree varieties suited for this area. If you are planning to add fruit trees to your landscape, use this bulletin to help you select varieties that have the best chance of providing you with all the fruit you can eat.

**Pruning Horrors**

Don’t make these mistakes!

People do incredibly horrible things to their plants when it comes to pruning. You frequently find this to be the case when it comes to plants in municipal areas. Cities seem to give employees a pruning instrument and NO TRAINING and send them out to prune trees along roads and in parks. But the compulsion to turn trees and shrubs into boxes and balls persists everywhere. Here are some examples of truly horrible pruning: Visit http://www.azplantlady.com/2009/11/most-shrubs-arent-meant-to-be-cupcakes.html for more examples Support www.plantamnesty.org!

**Vindication**

For years I have touted kohlrabi as a vegetable we should be growing. Well, the world has finally caught up with me. In the January 13, 2014 issue of *Time* magazine there is an article suggesting that kohlrabi is the new kale. You need to excuse its odd shape and look beyond that to enjoy the pleasures of this vegetable. YES! For once I’m ahead of the cultural scene. Vindication is good.
We all know the joys of eating sweet corn right out of the garden but have you ever had the fun of growing your own popcorn. If you have kids this is an especially entertaining thing to grow. But tell the kids to have patience; popcorn is not an overnight thing.

One of the fun things about popcorn is that you are not limited to white or yellow. It comes in every color of the rainbow. Well, until you pop it. Popping corn entails turning it inside out and the popped kernel will always be white or yellowish.

The plant was first cultivated in Peru. It is one of the oldest forms of corn—with evidence that it dates back to 4700 BC. In America it was used as breakfast cereal in the 1800’s. Yes, with milk and a sweetener. During the American depression popcorn was really cheap and became quite popular. Growing popcorn apparently saved more than one farm. During World War II people continued to eat it, especially since sugar was severely rationed. Americans ate three times the amount of popcorn during that period. Today most popcorn is grown in the Midwest and seven places claim they are the popcorn capital of America, while Illinois made popcorn its official state snack.

Street popcorn was created by vendors using a basket over a flame, which produced an unevenly cooked product. Charles Creators invented the first steam driven popper in 1885. He introduced his machine at the Columbian Exposition in 1892. Also in 1892 W.F. Rueckheim introduced a molasses flavored popcorn (caramel corn) and his brother altered the recipe and created Cracker Jacks. Over time a variety of popcorn machines were invented and now can be found in every movie theater in America. Today kettle corn is very popular and can be bought at nearly every fair or outdoor show in the country. It is cooked in a large kettle with white sugar and salt.

Popcorn is grown just like any other corn. Most take 100 days to reach maturity, some 90 days. Plant the seeds once the soil warms up. You can pre-sprout corn seeds or plant seeds inside in pots if you want to get an early start. Corn needs plenty of nitrogen and a good soaking once a week until the ears start to dry on the stalks. Grow a large patch of corn for the best pollination. Good pollination means the ears will be full of nice plump kernels. To help pollination along give the plants a good shake or two when the pollen is heavy. The silks should have formed a nice tuft and extend about an inch from the tip of the ears. If you didn’t realize it, each strand of silk is attached to one kernel. For the kernel to form completely each strand needs a pollen grain to find it.

If you plan on growing more than one type of corn, make sure they are far enough apart (200 feet). Corn is wind-pollinated but the pollen is fairly heavy so doesn’t travel more than 200 feet. Popcorn pollen will make your sweet corn really chewy but sweet corn pollen has no real effect on popcorn. The other thing that you can do is stagger your corn planting. If you plant four weeks apart, they should come into flower at different times.

Popcorn is subject to the same problems as sweet corn so earworms can be a problem. Bt can be used or if you don’t have too many plants or you can squirt vegetable oil into the opening where the silks are. Earworms usually only damage the top of the ear so it is also possible to just ignore them.

As the ear matures the husks will change from green to tan. Leave the ears on the plant as long as possible. Since we normally have dry weather this shouldn’t be a problem. Harvest when kernels look
glossy and you can’t dent the kernel with your fingernail. Once picked, let them dry longer in an area with good air circulation and warm temperatures. If you have rodents you might want to hang them up or protect them somehow.

The reason popcorn “pops” is the moisture inside the kernel. As the kernel is heated it becomes a miniature pressure cooker. The moisture turns to steam and the kernel gelatinizes, softens and becomes pliable. As the pressure increases the hull breaks. With the hull rupture the pressure drops and a rapid expansion of the steam causes the proteins and starch to literally foam. The foam cools very rapidly and you have popcorn! The perfect moisture content is 14% but without a laboratory you can tell by doing a test pop. Remove a few kernels from the center of the ear. If the test goes well, your corn is ready. The kernels from the middle are always going to be the best poppers. Weather and insects sometimes damage the ones at the tip; the ones at the bottom can be damaged by water. If the test goes poorly, let the corn dry longer.

Removing the kernels from the cob can be a trying experience. You will need gloves if you are going to do it by hand but there are some tools out there if you have a lot to clean. Once you get the kernels off the cob, store in a moisture-proof container like a glass jar with a tight lid. Store in the freezer for a month to kill any insect pests and then you can store in the cabinet or pop some. That’s what you have been waiting all summer for, right!

These day’s people buy that wretched microwave popcorn, but popping corn on the stove doesn’t take much longer than the microwave and you don’t get all the icky ingredients they flavor them with. (Use real butter is my advice.)

You can use a large 10-inch cast iron skillet with a lid. Wipe with a half-teaspoon of vegetable oil and place on medium high for 2 minutes. Add a quarter cup popcorn and reduce heat to medium. Stir gently until the first kernel pops. Cover, reduce heat to medium low and shake every 20 seconds or so. It’s done in 3 minutes. If it isn’t popped by then it won’t pop. Miniature popcorns take even less time. Dump it in a bowl; add REAL butter and seasonings and it’s ready. For variety use different seasonings like chili powder, cumin, garlic, oregano, Parmesan cheese—whatever strikes your fancy. If you want less fat and are having trouble getting the seasonings to stick spritz on something like olive oil or canola oil from a spray can.

Just plain popcorn is high in fiber and antioxidants, low in calories and fat. It’s all those things that we put on it that add up.

One of the favorite types of popcorn is Strawberry popcorn. It has dark red kernels on a small cob, hence it looks strawberryish but there are others available.

Heirloom Seeds www.heirloomseeds.com (Strawberry popcorn)
Seed Savers Exchange www.seed savers.org (Tom Thumb popcorn & a blue popcorn)
Henry Fields www.henryfields.com (Caramel Crisp and Mauveless Hybrid)
Territorial Seed http://www.territorialseed.com/ (Early Pink popcorn)
Victory Seeds http://www.victoryseeds.com/ (blue shaman popcorn and Japanese hulless popcorn)
Tip Cutting is a way of adding plants to your collection without buying them. With a small investment and willing friends this is an easy way to propagate new plants.

You will need pots and a soil-less potting mix that contains perlite or sand for good drainage and a container of rooting hormone. You will also need a tray with a cover or some sort of plastic cover of your own devising.

Plan to take your cuttings early in the growing season. Water the plants you are making the cuttings from the night before so when you make the cuts in the morning the plant tissues are well watered. You will be cutting the tips of the branches. The stem shouldn’t be more than one year of age and each cutting should include at least three sets of leaves. You want nice softwood cuttings. Once the stems start to harden it becomes a bit more difficult to root. Have all the materials needed for potting before you take the cuttings. The cuttings do not hold well.

Prepare your pots first. Moisten the potting soil. It should be moist—not soaked. Fill the pots and gently tamp down the soil.

Work in a shady spot, you don’t want the stems to dry out in the sun. Trim off the bottom pair of leaves using a CLEAN, VERY sharp knife or scissors. Then cut the stem off just below where you removed the leaves. Leave the top leaves intact unless they are very large. If they are large, cut one half off of each leaf. Dip the stem and the area where the leaves were removed in rooting compound. Tap off excess hormone. More is not better. While rooting hormone is non-toxic, you might want to work wearing gloves.

Use a pencil or something of similar diameter to make a hole in the potting soil about an inch deep. You want to make sure that the stem does not touch the bottom of the container. Put the cutting in the hole, making sure you don’t rub off the rooting compound. Place the pots in a tray and fill the tray with water to provide bottom watering. Avoid watering from above. Once the pots have absorbed all the water they need, leave just about a quarter inch of excess water in the tray.

Cover the cuttings with a plastic lid or devise that provides some kind of clear cover for them. You want to maintain a high humidity. Don’t seal them off, you want air circulation to prevent them from rotting. Place the cuttings in a sheltered area where they get good light but not full sun.

Check every few days to make sure the potting soil is moist; check for disease or pests. If there is a sign of fungal disease, remove any foliage you find it on. Improve air circulation if fungus is a problem.

Starting between 7 to 10 days you can check for roots. Tug gently on the cutting. If there is resistance, roots have formed. Once the cutting has roots, gradually over three days increase exposure to the sun and wind before planting in the garden.
The spider plant is one of the more common houseplants around, for good reason; it is nearly indestructible and it's constantly producing new plants to pass on to your friends. It will grow in most places in the house. It is also known as the airplane plant. Originally, the plant grew in the tropics of South Africa. It has naturalized in some additional areas of the world.

If you have a variegated plant, the variegation is most pronounced when it is near a window. The midday sun is not good for it, so consider the heat by the window before placing it.

Spider plants have long strap-like leaves that grow from a central stem, making it look like a floppy-leafed yucca. It comes in variegated varieties where the bright green leaves have a whitish strip down the center of the leaf or white strips on the edge and green in the middle. A plain green variety is available also. Long stems come from the center that has flower buds but they also develop young plants on the stems. Each of these young plants can be started in a pot of their own. It is best grown in a hanging pot or a stand that will show off the long arching stems.

This is a drop-dead easy plant to grow. In fact sometimes you might wish it didn't grow so well. It tolerates most temperatures you would find in any home; just keep it away from any locations where the sun blazes through the windows. You want bright light, not hot light. It doesn't do cold. Conditions must be frost-free. Spiders need to be watered 2 to 3 times a week although they can be somewhat drought tolerant even if they start to look a bit peaked due to lack of water. In the winter, water just once a week unless it's in a fairly warm location. Do not water if the temperature drops below 40°F. Our homes are pretty dry most of the year so the plants benefit from extra humidity like a pebble tray or misting each day. Fertilize lightly twice a month with houseplant food. They really need fertilizer to keep them nice because with any plant in a container nutrients tend to be washed away with the frequent watering. They can be potted in any type of potting soil. Once potted leave them alone; they do not mind being pot-bound. I've had plants that looked terrific even though I was hard pressed to find any soil in the pot. Thick white rhizomes had completely filled the container.

The preferred method for starting the young plants is to leave them connected to the stem and pot in a small container. Secure the plant and cut the stem to the parent once the little plantlet starts to grow new leaves.

The plant has few problems but there are a few things to look for:

Brown scorch marks on the edges of the leaves means you've been using a leaf shine product. Stop! The brown marks will stop appearing.

If the plant appears floppy and dull, give it some fertilizer or check to make sure it's getting enough water.

Red spider mites make the leaves dull and grayish. Spray with an insecticidal soap every 14 days until the mites are gone and improve the humidity around the plant.

If the variegation starts to disappear, it needs more light.

A plant rotting in the center means you've been a bit too liberal with the water. Let it dry out but you might be better off salvaging some of the plantlets and throwing away the parent. On the flip side, if the leaves look too dry and lose color chances are you aren't watering enough. Find a happy medium!

If the tips of the leaves turn brown and dry it has too much sunlight. Water more often and move out of the direct light.
FROM THE EDITOR: Please send or email articles and announcements to the address below. All articles must be in my hands by the 10th of the month. Short announcements (no more than 2 or 3 lines) will be accepted until the 25th.
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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Jeffrey C. Silvertooth, Associate Dean & Director, Economic Development & Extension, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, The University of Arizona. The University of Arizona is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution. The University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation in its programs and activities.
Meeting site is the Superior Court Building off of Hwy 260 in Camp Verde.

2840 N. Commonwealth Dr.

**Next Meeting**

April 16, Camp Verde, 6:30pm

The speaker at the MG meeting on April 16 in Camp Verde is Dr. Doug Tolleson. He is the Rangeland Management Specialist of the UA Agriculture Research Station at V-V Ranch.

His topic is: "The Importance of Vegetation Monitoring in Rangeland Management"