**Fruit Tree Maintenance**

If you have fruit trees your short winter break is over, and you are going to be getting busy with pruning in about a month. Right now you need to be thinking about an application of dormant oil. Dormant oil spray is the first spray of the New Year for orchard and fruit tree owners. Although dormant oil applications can be avoided if scale has never been an issue with your trees, it is an inexpensive protection against a real threat.

Dormant oil application is best done on clear days when the temperature is between 45 and 70 degree’s, and there are no freezing temperatures in the forecast for at least the next 24 hours. This would usually be now through late-February for our area. Spraying before buds begin to swell is best; do not spray trees that are in bloom. If you only have a few trees and are able to get your timing correct you can spray dormant oil just after pruning, but before budbreak. The dormant oil will help to cover and protect the pruning cuts while also killing pest. While this is a nice idea, it is not necessary, spraying before bud’s swell is most important. So, if you are short of time just spray them when all the other conditions are correct.

What exactly is dormant oil? Dormant oils are petroleum oils that have been highly refined and formulated for orchard use. Many also now have an emulsifier added to help them mixed with water. However, you do need to periodically shake your sprayer to keep the oil and water in a mixture. When sprayed on fruit trees the dormant oil will spread uniformly over bark of the tree filling all the crooks and crevices. This will coat dormant insects on the trees and smother them.

If you are curious if scale is even an issue you should worry about, I would certainly recommend you make this inexpensive application. I see and hear of many fruit trees succumbing to scale every year. We have an excellent homeowner fruit tree spray guide available, just give us a call or stop by the office and we can get you one.