



Connie's Corner

Empathetic Pruning

by Connie Kratzke

Hello All! I found inspiration via serendipity today. This is a rather inopportune time to write a Connie's Corner, but I want to share my revelation, which started with a weird idea I had a few days ago at around 5:00 AM.

I wonder about things chronically. One of the things I wondered about while attempting to milk out my last hour of slumber (unsuccessfully) the other morning led to a metaphorical snipe hunt. Is there anything that can be tank mixed with pesticides that will repel bees? Situations exist in which systemic products with long residuals seem like our only options. Could we deter bees from visiting treated plants to prevent casualties? Now, there's more to this thought than I care to elaborate on because that's not why I am writing today.

My concept and peoples' reactions to it inspired an email exchange between my mother and I, and that got me thinking about the real value of empathy. Sometimes I get a little too excited. I am an over-sharer. Efforts to bond or collaborate with other humans occasionally backfire when I launch into outer space. When space won't have me, I vent to my mommy. Mom heads as quickly down the war path as I do towards the

stratosphere, so that helps put things in perspective. My natural landing place is empathy, even if I get there via a circuitous route. That's when I realize I'm the weird one and I can't expect people to board my shuttle without some reservations.

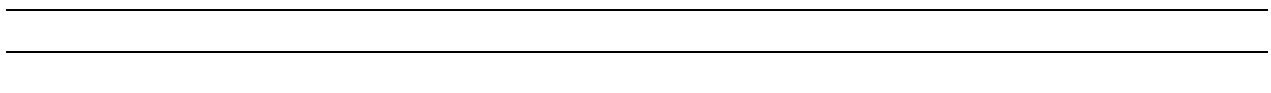
How is this relevant? I read an [article on pruning Oaks](#) yesterday because I got to over-thinking every cut I was making. I've included the link because it contains great information. What initiated the spinning of my head was the term, "apical meristem". The limited amount I know about meristematic tissues, stem cells and hormonal interactions got me wondering if cuts I was making were creating the next problem.

Now, I know how to prune. Cut outside the branch collar. Eliminate branches that cross, rub or grow towards the middle. Prune out double leaders. It's not rocket science! That said, pruning is much more like Chess than Checkers. The moves I make today influence what the tree does next year. Perhaps in this instance, I am not over-thinking but underthinking. That's where acquiring more knowledge comes in. The article I read is called, "Pruning Oaks: Training the Young to Achieve Grandeur," by Guy Sternberg. What I suspected was true. Chopping off the terminal ends of branches leads to excessive bud production and the development of whorls. Whorls can cause structural issues and must gradually be eliminated.

This is where empathy comes in. When we prune for a desired result, we need to consider our impact on the tree. Hormonal responses to injuries (intentional or otherwise) can yield undesirable results. What we tell the tree to do via purposeful injury can cause it to act out. The tree didn't choose crazy, it was programmed to behave that way. Our own actions and reactions can be appropriate, inappropriate and everything in between. Sometimes we use logic to make intellectual decisions. On other occasions, we allow emotion to supercede intellect. Hormones take the driver's seat for some of those missions. Plant physiology is more similar to our own than we may realize. Finding this parallel only took a few paragraphs.

Trees want the same things we want. They hope to live long, prosper and procreate. When our main goal is making their appearance meet our expectations, we risk becoming misaligned. Mom didn't like what I did with my eyebrows as a teen. Her criticism of that triggered a hormonal reaction. We may not appreciate the aesthetics of over-achieving branches but if we cut them off, we could stimulate more weirdness than a single free spirit could ever express.

Get out there and stare at mature trees in the landscape. That is what awkward seedlings aspire to be. Notice the branching habits of each genus. What you think is incorrect might not be. Quashing the individuality of adolescent trees in effort to produce well-behaved clones can backfire. Remove obvious injuries and flaws and let little imperfections slide. Remove them during the next pruning cycle before their calipers thicken too much. Take what you must, but don't rush. Leave as much food making material as you can to promote good health. Harvest is a few years away. Perhaps you don't love the way a branch wobbles or curves. Mom didn't love my taste in music or choice of friends growing up. At the end of the day, I love Mom, she loves me and we're both still alive. Want for your trees what you want for yourself and they will pay back dividends.



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