President’s Message:
Complicated Times

David Robbins

We are living in complicated times. For better or for worse, technology has increased our capabilities, productivity, and connectivity. One of the side-effects of this is an acceleration of life to a new normal pace that could be best described as “frenzied”.

The availability of information is at a level unprecedented in history. However, hyper-connectivity in the information age has combined with political agendas to create rampant misinformation, leading to a level of mistrust and division in America that is arguably the highest it has been in 150 years. Yet, at the same time, people are using this new connectivity to come together and help each other in ways we’ve never seen before.

I cannot begin to enumerate all the things I have learned at all the Walnut Council workshops over the years. Sure, I have learned a lot about trees and how to manage them; but I have also learned about all aspects of life, from the side conversations that inevitably occur when you gather a group of passionate, intelligent, and knowledgeable people. I have met new people, and made friendships that will last a lifetime.

But none of it is worth dying for.

Life is about weighing pros versus cons, and risks versus rewards. Regardless of where your beliefs fall on the political spectrum, and who you choose to listen to in these complicated times, COVID-19 is a serious risk.

As president of the Maryland Chapter of the Walnut Council, potentially compromising the safety of our membership is a risk I am not willing to take. I have therefore decided to suspend all in-person Maryland Chapter events and workshops until further notice. Once there is safe and

President’s Message (Continued on page 3)
In the spring of 1998 two agroforestry demonstration sites were developed by the Maryland Chapter of the Walnut Council, the Maryland Forest Service, and the University of Maryland at the University’s Western Maryland Research and Education Center (WMREC), located in Keedysville, Washington County Maryland. Since then many Walnut Council members and other interested people have visited the site, carried out needed work and learned about various aspects of tree management. This is a short summary of what has happened over the years, current conditions, what might need to be done, and what we learned.

At the first, Site 1 is a demonstration of alley-cropping and interplanting. Very large and vigorous one-year-old black walnut seedlings were planted at a spacing of approximately 10 x 24 feet - wide enough to get a small corn planter and small combine between the rows for a few years. Black raspberry plants and pawpaw seedlings were interplanted in some of the walnut rows. Survival was excellent and the trees grew quickly, especially at the lower end of the site, aided by the weed control provided by the shade from the corn. After 3 years, when interplanting of corn had ended due to tree crowding, about 95% of the trees were surviving. Since then the Maryland Chapter has carried out corrective pruning in the early years and side pruning of branches up to 18 feet to help grow an economically valuable tree. Weed control spraying, and bush-hogging between the rows was performed several times. At about 8 years of age the stand was thinned by Maryland Chapter members using the crown competition factor (CCF) method, cutting and removing the poorest and most crowded trees with chainsaws. Thinning by

Phil Pannill
Maryland Chapter Secretary/Treasurer

Picture of the walnut trees at WMREC Agroforestry Demonstration Area Site 1, in October of 2020.
effective vaccine for SARS-CoV-2 that is widely administered throughout the population, or some other legitimate indication that COVID-19 is no longer a concern, then I will reevaluate the risks versus rewards of holding in-person workshops.

There’s no way of knowing exactly when this will be. For now, I know we will not be holding a Fall Workshop this year. I also suspect that we will not hold a Spring Workshop in 2021, but time will tell.

In the interim, we will continue publishing our Chapter Newsletter, and I will continue forwarding pertinent information and resources to our membership. I also encourage you to participate in the many webinars and virtual events being planned by the National Walnut Council. These events are excellent opportunities to learn from the experts on a wide variety of topics.

Anyone interested in a virtual chapter event, or with ideas for topics, can share them with me. If there is enough interest in holding a virtual meeting, I will be happy to set something up.

Until we see each other again - Stay safe, stay healthy, take care of yourself, and take care of someone else. I hope to see all of you as soon as we can safely do so.

As always, feel free to contact me at any time if you have questions or suggestions, or just want to catch up. I can be reached at 443-273-3046, or dave.robbins@maryland.gov.

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**Tree Fertilization Question and Response**

*This article is a question from a Frederick County resident, sent via email to the Maryland Chapter, and the answer provided by our Secretary/Treasurer and resident expert, Phil Pannill.*

**Question:**

Because of impending septic field work in my yard, with the disruption to some root systems that is likely to result, [and] after decades of, in all probability, the previous owner's having the fallen leaves simply thrown away, I am hoping to retain whatever advice you may offer, in fertilizing the trees over this winter, and into next spring.

**Response:**

It sounds like you are dealing with a limited number of trees in a small area.

It is important to not do anything drastic in the way of fertilization that might negatively affect your trees. The best thing is to do what you can to minimize root disturbance; including not driving equipment over the root system or digging or filling (increasing the soil depth) in the root zone. It is common practice to put up temporary fencing or markers - a row of wire flags or wooden stakes with plastic ribbon would be easy to do - to mark off-limits areas. Have large roots cut cleanly if possible.

It is unlikely that you can make much improvement in a favorable way, in the short term. If you have good soil, there is not much needed. If you have poor soil (for trees) there is not much you can change. If you have ready access to mulched or chopped up leaves, like from a lawn.

Tree Fertilizing (Continued on page 5)
removing a few small and poor trees for firewood also occurred at about 12 years of age. Since then, the stand has been marked several times for a third thinning, which never materialized. The black raspberries did survive but were never prolific while the pawpaw trees are just now getting tall enough to produce fruit, but probably won’t do so while still under the trees.

The average tree diameter at Site 1 is now about 8 inches. The stand is crowded and in need of thinning. Trees to be removed could be marked via the CCF, or more likely the crop tree release method. There does not appear to be interest in cutting firewood now – when there is a glut of dead and dying ash trees, which make better firewood than walnut. Elimination could be by cutting and letting them lay or killing them standing, by girdling and herbicide treatment. The site is becoming infested with the invasive exotic shrubs autumn olive and bush honeysuckle, and oriental bittersweet vine. These should be sprayed and/or manually cut and stump treated, something that will likely need to be repeated over the years.

Lessons from Site 1 include the importance of good soil and good site preparation, the validity of temporary intercropping with corn, and the importance of timely pruning and thinning – all of which are well known. Interplanting of pawpaw and black raspberry was a failure, with the plants surviving but never thriving.

The second area, Site 2, is a demonstration of alley-cropping and silvopastoral grazing (livestock among the trees). This was also intended as a comparison of planting tree seedlings in tree shelters, without shelters, and direct planting nuts – all while protected by electric fence. Trees were planted, also in 1998, at a spacing of 7 by 36 feet, with tree shelters on every other tree, (i.e., alternating). Stratified black walnut nuts were planted in between each seedling, creating a 3.5 ft spacing within the row. Corn was grown between the rows for several years, then each paddock created by the tree rows and fence were planted to different warm-season and cool-season grasses. Grazing has taken place at various times by cattle, sheep and goats, which has continued intermittently. An electric fence wire alongside each tree row gave protection from deer and livestock for the first several years. The tree rows were kept mostly weed-free by herbicide application.

At four years of age the trees in Site 2 were doing well with noticeable but not major differences between the planting types. The various survival rates, heights and diameters are shown on the following charts.
Corrective pruning of the young trees, and later "side pruning" for wood quality, was performed by Maryland Chapter members until an 18-foot clear trunk was achieved, if practical. A thinning was performed based on the CCF method when the trees were 8 years old, with the cut trees removed from the site to facilitate mowing and grazing. The stand was marked for thinning again at various times over the years, which were arranged for but never worked out.

If your soil is acidic (low pH), you can scatter a very thin layer of wood ashes or pelletized lime. If you are in an area with limestone rock, as in much of central and southern Frederick County, this is not needed. A soil test (via University of Maryland Cooperative Extension) could give you an idea of any major nutrient deficiencies, which might be worthwhile if you are dealing with a large area. However, I would really not recommend using typical chemical fertilizer in your situation, since it could do more harm than good. You shouldn't do any tillage or digging of the surface soil to incorporate fertilizer since this is where most of the feeder roots are located. In a situation like this, chemical fertilizer, especially Nitrogen (N) makes the grass grow faster and thicker, which is bad for the trees.

I appreciate your concern for preserving your trees and wish you good luck.
advantage if weed control is just as good and the trees were effectively protected from deer or grazing damage. Direct seeding of walnut nuts worked well and was less expensive, but growth of those seedlings rarely caught up to the planted seedlings (which were good size seedlings), and the nut-origin trees were mostly taken out in the first thinning. The wide row spacing allowed one more

Site 2 is also in need of thinning and should probably be done in the same manner described for Site 1. However, since this is an active grazing site, removal of the heavy woody debris from the thinning would be needed. The wide spacing between rows at Site 2 has helped prevent growth from stagnating entirely.

Lessons learned at Demo Site 2 include that using tree shelters on walnut trees gave no advantage if weed control is just as good and the trees were effectively protected from deer or grazing damage. Direct seeding of walnut nuts worked well and was less expensive, but growth of those seedlings rarely caught up to the planted seedlings (which were good size seedlings), and the nut-origin trees were mostly taken out in the first thinning. The wide row spacing allowed one more
year of crop production, but also allowed growth of more side branches that required pruning. Even twenty-two years later, there is sufficient light to allow good growth of grasses, though the cool-season grasses (bluegrass, timothy, orchardgrass) have now won out over the warm-season ones (big bluestem, eastern gamagrass [which dairy heifers loved to eat]).

A secondary site was added to Site 2, some years later, and is known as Site 2b. This site includes a variety of tree species being managed for different objectives, including walnut, red oak, green ash, and persimmon. But we’ll save that for another article.

Got E-mail?

Occasionally we have timely information to share with you. If you have an e-mail account, but have not received any e-mails from us this year, that means we don’t have your current address. If you would like to be included in the e-mail news list, please send an e-mail to Dave Robbins at: dave.robbins@maryland.gov.

We promise not to clutter your inbox!

Upcoming Events:

Mid-Atlantic Women in Agriculture Webinar: Creating a Farm Business Continuity Plan
Date: January 13, 2021 - 12:00 p.m.
Location: Online Webinar
Registration: https://extension.umd.edu/events/wed-2021-01-13-1200-midatlantic-women-agriculture-webinar-creating-farm-business-continuity

Landscaping a Septic System?
Date: January 20, 2021 - 12:00 p.m.
Location: Online Webinar
Registration: https://extension.umd.edu/events/wed-2021-01-20-1200-landscaping-septic-system

Good Morning Farmer - Winter Blues
Date: February 17, 2021 - 8:00 a.m.
Location: Online Webinar
Registration: https://extension.umd.edu/events/wed-2021-02-17-0800-good-morning-farmer-winter-blues

MidAtlantic Women in Agriculture Webinar: Planning for Retirement
Date: February 24, 2021 - 12:00 p.m.
Location: Online Webinar
Registration: https://extension.umd.edu/events/wed-2021-02-24-1200-midatlantic-women-agriculture-webinar-planning-retirement

Good Morning, Farmer - Injury & Pain Management
Date: March 3, 2021 - 8:00 a.m.
Location: Online Webinar
Registration: https://extension.umd.edu/events/wed-2021-03-03-0800-good-morning-farmer-injury-pain-management

National Walnut Council Annual Meeting
Date: July 25-28, 2021
Location: Carbondale, Illinois
Registration: https://walnutcouncil.org/events/annual-meeting/registration-form/
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