

Friday's Feature

By

Theresa Friday

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Homeowner's guide for fertilizing pecan trees

The pecan tree is a beautiful, large growing shade tree. While pecan trees can be grown rather easily, a good nut crop requires proper fertilization and a carefully planned and executed program of pest control.

With pecan trees, the most important cultural practice the homeowner needs to consider is proper fertilization. A lack of nutrients causes poor shoot growth, reduced nut set and increased susceptibility to diseases.

The first step to a successful fertilization program is to take a soil sample to be sure the soil is at the proper pH. Contact your local Extension Office for instructions on how to take and submit a proper soil sample.

After the establishment year, two pounds of fertilizer should be applied for each inch of trunk diameter (measured at about one foot above the soil line) in February and again in June. For example, a tree that is ten inches in diameter should receive 20 pounds of fertilizer twice a year.

The best way to apply the fertilizer is to broadcast it evenly beneath the tree. Start about one foot from the trunk and spread the fertilizer to slightly beyond the tips of the branches. Surface application is sufficient. Placing fertilizer in holes punched into the soil beneath the trees offers no true benefit in most situations.

Pecan trees in Florida require a balanced formulation such as a "triple 10" fertilizer. But because a common problem with pecans is zinc deficiencies, a form of zinc should also be applied. However, if you buy a "pecan tree special" fertilizer you can eliminate one of these tasks, because it's already blended with zinc.

Standard fertilization of pecan trees in the landscape may present problems for lawns beneath the trees. It may be better for the tree and lawn to allow only mulch under the tree.

Besides adequate fertilization, backyard pecan trees need proper sanitation. This means, simply, keep the floor area around the tree clean of limbs, old nuts and leaves. This debris provides a home for pests, and you definitely don't want pests.

Backyard pecan pests include pecan weevils, pecan scab and pecan phylloxera. Pecan weevils are the tiny carpenters that bore the pin-sized hole often seen on nuts from homegrown trees.

Pecan phylloxera is a small, wasp-like insect that stings the leaves of pecan trees. Inside the leaf, the female lays an egg that forms a gall on the leaf. It looks like a bump on the leaf and cuts down on production.

Pecan scab is a disease that is best prevented by planting resistant varieties like Curtis or Elliot. Pruning any limbs touching the ground improves air movement through the tree's canopy. This also reduces the leaf wetness necessary for disease development.

If your home pecan trees are infected by insects or diseases, special equipment is typically needed for an effective treatment. For the homeowner, it's virtually impossible and impractical to try to treat for these problems.

Annual fertilization is the most practical and effective tool available to the homeowner for improving pecan production. But, fertilizers cannot compensate for poor conditions such as lack of moisture, undesirable soil and sites or poor varieties.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>