Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. We have a tree with a very large trunk and are not sure how to proceed. A trunk of a 20 inch diameter live oak tree is leaning over our house. It has been there forever but now is leaning further. We can tell because it has pushed a rock post down that it didn’t even touch 1 year ago. How do we figure out what we can do to protect the house? We hate to think about having the tree removed but it is better than having it fall on the house!

A. The first step is to contact a certified arborist and ask him/her to examine the situation and make a recommendation including to offer a price to correct the problem. Most arborists will make a recommendation and provide a bid without a charge. Options may be to cut the tree down or brace and/or wire the trunk. Find the arborist by conferring with a neighbor that had work done, or by contacting your County Extension Agent. They can also be found in the phone book or on the internet. You could obtain 2 opinions and bids.

Q. We always look forward to obtaining the “Rodeo Tomato” for the year. It seems like you usually have discussed it by now? Is there going to be one?

A. The new rodeo tomato this year is called the “Red Deuce”. Its main claim to fame seems to be its large- sized fruit. As always this year’s rodeo tomato has been selected by the Jerry Parsons and the local AgriLife Extension staff and their volunteers in tests with a large number of tomato varieties. It will be offered first to attendees of the San Antonio Rodeo and Stock Show, and then will be sold at area nurseries. Visit plantanswers.com for more information on the “Red Deuce”.

Q. We are growing our own tomatoes by seed this year. When can we plant them in the garden?

A. Sometime after March 15 if the soil and air temperatures are warm enough. One option is to pot-up the seedlings in 1 gallon containers of potting mix and osmocote. Put the containers in full sun out of the wind until the weather warms up. If temperatures are forecast to be under 40 degrees move the potted-up tomatoes into shelter until it warms up. Potting-up usually allows the tomatoes to keep growing at a fast rate until the soil warms-up. If they are planted in cold soil, they will harden-up and the fruit will be delayed.

 Q. Remind us again what the recommended shade trees are for our area. Which grow the fastest?

A. The recommended shade trees include Texas red oak, Mexican white oak, cedar elm, Mexican sycamore, bur oak, chinkapin oak, lacey oak, Chinese pistache, and Montezuma cypress. Texas red oak, Mexican sycamore, Mexican white oak, and Chinese pistache grow the fastest. If your area is dominated by red oaks and live oaks diversify your planting by selecting non-oak species to protect against oak wilt.

Q. We are anxious for our Bermuda grass lawn to green up. If we fertilize now will it green up faster this spring?

A. No, wait until the grass greens up (about April 15-May 1) before applying a slow-release lawn fertilizer for the growing season. Only the weeds and maybe your shade trees will benefit with fertilization in February. Aerating and top dressing the lawn now will contribute much more to green-up and season long growth than early fertilization.