

Gardening Q and A

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Q. I bought my property six years ago. For the first 3 years the pecans produced a good crop of paper shell and native pecans. Now for 3 years the production has been low and poor quality. One year most of the crop was shells with shrunken dried meats. Quite often the nuts have brown blotches on them. They taste bitter. I water the lawn when it becomes dry and fertilize it with a 10-10-10 fertilizer which the previous owner said was the best fertilizer for pecans in our sandy loam soil. What do I need to do to restore the production back to the original levels?

A. It sounds like you need to re-consider how you are managing the trees. To maximize production requires a well-timed extensive spray program. Fertilization that includes zinc and generous amounts of irrigation. My recommendation would be for you to contact your County Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service Agent. Work with him to organize a reasonable management program and practical expectations from the trees.

Q. My lawn is plagued by brown patch fungal disease because there are low areas that collect moisture. I thought it would be simple to respond to your advice to raise the grade by one inch by using compost. The problem is that the material I looked at was dominated by flakes of brush and sawdust which didn't spread well or make a good fill material. I thought I would try top soil, but it has lumps of clay in it that makes it hard to spread. Any other ideas?

A. There are many excellent suppliers of compost in the region. You could check out another supplier, but I think the easiest solution would be to use some top-dressing for your one inch of fill. A portion of the top dressing is sand, and it is usually easy to spread and has more mass than straight compost.

Q. The army worms are moving across the lawns in our neighborhood eating everything in their path. Will a BT product stop them?

A. It will kill some of the worms if you can apply it to the grass or plant foliage that they are eating before the worms reach it but in the case of army worms it is probably more effective to spray the leading edge and into the mass of moving caterpillars with malathion. Follow label instructions.

Q. Our favorite nursery has primula for using as a winter blooming plant in the shade. They are beautiful. Is there any trick to grow them? How cold sensitive are they?

A. I agree primula are beautiful. The blooms are colored so intensely and look so waxy, they remind me of the show paint that clowns use in the circus. Primula are in the same league as snapdragons are far as cold tolerance. I don't cover snaps to protect the blooms, but you can put a layer of agricultural fiber over both primula and cyclamen to preserve the blooms from normal freezes. The plants are more

expensive than snapdragons and it takes primula and cyclamen longer to rebloom if the buds and flowers are frozen. It is also a good idea to protect primula from slugs and snails. A bait works well.

Q. Can we plant spinach transplants now? In the past we lost our plants to hot spells.

A. Yes, the temperatures should be consistently cool enough in November for spinach to prosper.