State of the Fruit Trees

Distribute 4-21- 2016

If you have fruit trees, depending on the species and even the selection will determine what condition they are in this spring.

Citrus are in generally excellent condition after a mild winter with well- timed rains. They should be blooming now and putting on a flush of new foliage. In my landscape the grapefruit and lemons are particularly fragrant. If you have Mexican limes you probably have new blooms, small fruit and even some mature fruit. As promising as everything looks on backyard citrus, don’t be surprised if the yield is greatly reduced from last year on the trees that had the greatest production. Citrus have a tendency to be alternate bearing which means that years with large production are usually followed by years with reduced production.

To minimize alternate bearing and to encourage strong growth, fertilize your backyard citrus trees. For the trees in half whiskey barrels or other containers they should receive a generous dose of Osmocote or other slow release fertilizer formulated specially for containers. Cover one-third to one-half of the soil surface with the fertilizer beads. Once a month through the summer and into the fall supplement the Osmocote with an application of soluble fertilizer from a bucket. Rather than mix up the soluble fertilizer every time it is applied, mix a large batch in a plastic garbage can. Dip out of the garbage can for the container plants with a smaller bucket. I use Miracid because I have blueberries in containers in addition to the lemons, limes and other citrus.

Peaches are a mixed bag this spring. If you have Florida King, Springold, or other very low chill variety, they are probably in excellent condition with golf-ball size fruit and full foliage. Unfortunately in many parts of San Antonio and areas south of the City, we did not receive enough winter cold to reorganize the chemistry of most medium chill varieties. If you have Junegold, Texstar, and other selections, the blooms and leaves are in a confused state. They are emerging in an irregular pattern. As your home gets closer to the Hill Country the amount of chill hours becomes more likely to be adequate. The peaches (also apples and plums) are more likely to showing foliage and fruit patterns that you expect.

Adding extra fertilizer will not help the trees affected by inadequate chill hours. They have to be left to run the course of leaf production. Most will not have much fruit production but they will probably recover for another attempt next winter.

For the trees that have a good fruit set, continue your spray program to protect the fruit from fungus and insects. Stink bugs are the most serious threat. Organic gardeners can try the sulfur products and organic insecticides. Sevin is the most effective manufactured control for stink bugs. Captan works well to prevent brown rot.

One of the most noticeable fruit trees in area landscapes right now is pomegranate. The traditional selection, Wonderful, is a multi-stemmed shrub that grows to 20 feet tall. Since the end of March the plants have been covered with large glow-in-the-dark orange blossoms. Some time in May the blooming will be complete and the decorative fruit will begin its growth period. Pomegranite is in high favor now because of its nutritional value. In addition to Wonderful, area nurseries have at least 10 other varieties that produce different size fruits on various-sized plants. Pomegranate produces fruit without the need for pesticide sprays. Deer do not eat pomegranate plants in most neighborhoods.

Last year was a mixed experience for figs. Plants that ripened their fruit early were productive but fruit that did not ripen before the dry spell last summer, never did ripen. This year the moisture situation is starting out well again. Foliage on figs looks good. You can increase your figs drought tolerance by applying a thick layer of mulch over the roots. If your water situation allows you to provide supplemental irrigation, start early and apply water every time we go 2 weeks or more without rain.

Figs, like pomegranates, produce fruit without the need for a spray program. Deer, however will eat the foliage and stems.