

Question and Answer

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Q. In one of your articles and on the Gardening South Texas Radio Show you listed chinaberry on the B-list of shade trees along with pecans and hackberries. Chinaberry is a notorious invasive plant how can it be on the same list as hackberry and pecan which have some redeeming features?

A. At this point in my shade tree ratings I only have 2 categories- A and B. I place live oak, Texas red oak, Mexican sycamore, cedar elm, Texas pistache, chinkapin oak, bur oak, Mexican white oak, and Shumard oak on the A list because of their drought tolerance, longevity, attractiveness, and resistance to pests. The oaks remain on the A-list even with their susceptibility to oak wilt because the disease is relatively easy to prevent if you paint the pruning wounds and are alert to tree health in the neighborhood. The B-list does have trees such as pecans and hackberries that have some positive characteristics. It also has mulberries that I like as a wildlife food source. I suppose a shade tree rating determination could have more than two categories with a tree like chinaberry rating in the lowest category. Everybody can consider my rating system and change or expand it to fit their own tree quality determinants.

Q. Calvin, please warn everyone that has deer in their neighborhood that the does become very aggressive for a period after the fawns are born. A pair of does caught me off guard and attempted to stomp my terrier on a leash. They were persistent in trying to get at her as we fled the area.

A. Yes, thank you for reminding us. Watching how the does react to pets when they have fawns is important. It is also close to the time when the bucks will use tree stumps to rub the felt off of their antlers. Protect young trees with a sturdy piece of fence 5ft tall and at least 3ft in diameter reinforced with three fence posts. It is common for trees to be girdled and the growth rate permanently reduced by the bucks rubbing.

Q. How do we know whether we should pull our spring-planted tomato plants now? Ours still have green fruit.

A. Pull the old plants now so that you can plant the new fall transplants by the 3rd week in July. Harvest all the full size fruit. It will ripen on the kitchen counter and you can make some fried green tomatoes. Plants left later into the summer are likely to become infested with spider mites and fungus diseases.

Q. We harvested our peaches (us and the birds!). How do we care for the trees now?

A. The flower buds for next spring's peaches are formed in the summer before so make sure the trees are watered enough to maintain good foliage. Once/ week is best. If there isn't 18 inches of new growth by the end of July, apply 1 cup of slow release lawn fertilizer for each inch of trunk diameter. Apply the fertilizer about August 1.

Q. Are there any hot weather annuals that we can plant in a front shrub border area frequented by the deer? Iris worked this spring and we would like to have more flowers this summer.

A. In some locations deer do not eat zinnias but the most deer-proof summer flowers are vinca. Use the Cora series. They are available in white, red, pink and lavender. Vinca are drought tolerant once they are established. Water 3 times/week for 2 weeks and then twice per week for 2 weeks. Some gardeners spray all new plantings with Liquid Fence once/week for 4 weeks to discourage deer from testing new plantings.