Gardening Question and Answer

Distribute 07-11-2016

Q. We just purchased a new home that is built in the middle of an old pecan orchard. The trees are large and very beautiful. What care do we have to provide them to insure that they produce nuts each year?

A. A commercial pecan orchard would apply nitrogen fertilizer to the soil each year and zinc to the foliage. There are also a number of insect sprays recommended starting with dormant oil in the winter and other sprays through the spring and summer. Irrigation is another issue. To maximize nut production the trees require upwards of 1 inch of water each week in the growing season. It may not be practical for a homeowner to conduct such a care regime. If you want to explore it further confer with your Texas A&M AgriLife Extension agent.

It is probably more practical to do without irrigation and a spray program and just collect the nuts that are produced and fall to the ground. The size of the crop will vary based on rainfall.

Q. What are some of the best plants we can plant to provide nectar and caterpillar food for butterflies?

A. Blue mistflower, zinnias, cosmos, vitex, poinciana, esperanza, Fanick’s phlox, duranta, penta, salvias, lantanas, and thyrallis are all blooming now. Passion vine, dill, canna, flame acanthus, and citrus provide egg-laying sites for specific species of butterflies. To contribute to the effort to restore the Monarch population plant milkweed for the nectar and as food for caterpillars. Plant native milkweeds if you can find them. Tropical milkweeds have the most attractive flowers and are excellent nesting sites. They are available at most nurseries. A key to maximizing butterfly populations in your landscape is to offer nectar plants 12 months of the year. Visit plantanswers.com for lists of nectar plants in my archived articles.

Q. Our crape myrtles are not blooming yet. Is it because the mildew on their leaves is preventing the bloom? Is there anything we can do by way of fertilization or pesticides?

A. Every variety of crape myrtle has a different pattern and length of bloom based on its genetics and its reaction to the environment. To have bloom all varieties must put on new growth. Did your plants put on new growth? If not, some slow release lawn fertilizer and irrigation may help future blooming. Powdery mildew will delay bloom. Now that the rains have stopped the mildew will be less of an issue. A fungicide spray probably won’t help. Next time you buy crape myrtles, obtain the varieties that are mildew resistant.

Q. At what level should I mow our Bermuda grass? We mow high and it does not look as good as I expected.

A. Mow it low at 1.5 inches or less and mow frequently. The idea is to train it to produce its leaf surface low. It only works if the Bermuda is mowed before it grows to 2.25 inches.

Q. Why have our tomatoes quit ripening? They turn white on the vine but not red!

A. The hot weather interferes with sugar production and ripening. It is time to pull your spring tomatoes in favor of new transplants for the fall. Pick all the white tomatoes and let them ripen in the house.