

Heavy pecan harvests may lead to broken limbs

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson



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Pecans across the county have set a remarkably heavy nut crop, which often leads to broken branches. Late July through September is known as the kernel fill stage, and adequate soil moisture during this time is of critical importance.



Q: My pecan trees have produced a heavy crop load this year.

The crop load is so heavy that some branches have broken.

Will my pecan trees be able to carry the nut crop to maturity?

A: Pecans across the county have set a remarkably heavy nut crop.

That's good news given that most pecans have not set a decent crop since Hurricane Ike devastated pecan production in 2008.

A heavy pecan harvest often will lead to broken limbs or branches because of the weight of the pecans.

Since we still are in a severe drought, you will have to provide supplemental irrigation to avoid nut drop or loss.

Late July through September is known as the kernel fill stage, and adequate soil moisture during this time is of critical importance.

The root system of a pecan tree is at least twice the width of a tree's canopy.

Water the entire root soil area to encourage maximum production.

Each irrigation should be sufficient to thoroughly moisten the soil. The water needs of large trees with a heavy nut crop can be 2 inches or more per week during August and

September.

To avoid runoff, this can mean irrigating twice a week during dry spells.

If lawn grasses are under the trees competing for water, additional water will be needed to compensate.

Large pecan trees require the highest degree of consistent watering during late summer to early fall.

The first half of September is an especially critical period for nut production. Provide plenty of supplemental irrigation to pecan trees at this time of year to produce a nut crop to maturity.

One drawback to such heavy

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watering is the restriction on water use in some areas because of the drought.

Another drawback is the water bill from heavy watering can drain your pocketbook.

Q: Why are my crape myrtles along my driveway dripping sap on everything?

My car is covered with tree sap that won't wash off easily. What causes this, and when will this stop?

A: Cars, patios, decks and even grass often get covered with "tree sap" at this time of the year.

It's a sugary by-product of certain soft-bodied, sucking insects such as aphids, mealybugs, and scale.

It technically is known as honeydew but it still is tree sap that has passed through the body of one of these insects before it lands on your car. Let's just call this processed tree sap.

In addition to direct damage from feeding, aphids and other insects can damage plants indirectly by secreting honeydew.

Honeydew is a perfect substrate for the growth of sooty mold fungi and a source of food for other insects such as ants, wasps and flies.

Although unsightly, the sooty mold growth itself does not directly harm the crape myrtle; instead, it shades the leaves from light and interferes with photosynthesis.

Under heavy infestations, sooty mold-covered leaves may drop early.

After a few weeks, heavy deposits of honeydew likely will turn black as the sooty molds grow on it.

It would not be so noticeable if we had

rainfall on a more regular basis to help wash it away. Crape myrtles are among the worst offenders.

Application of insecticidal soaps or neem oil is recommended as an organic option.

A synthetic insecticide containing permethrin, cyfluthrin or bifenthrin is recommended for aphid control on crape myrtles.

Always read and follow the manufacturer's directions contained on the label.

Q: The bark on my crape myrtles is peeling off, and it looks like it has been shredded and just hangs off the trunk and some of the lower branches. Is this normal?

A: As crape myrtles age, the bark will begin to peel off. The horticultural term for this is exfoliating.

This is normal, and there is no cause for alarm. After the gray bark peels away, you might notice a different shade of underbark.

Some of the newer varieties have colors ranging from cinnamon to dark brown in color. This colorful underbark adds to the beauty of a crape myrtle, especially in the winter.

