

Oak trees producing bumper crop of acorns

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

Whether it's a small crop or a large crop, oak trees can be expected to start dropping their acorns as the fall season progresses.

Since the arrival of the cool front in late September that signaled the start of the fall season, I have enjoyed sitting in a comfortable chair on my front porch as the sun begins to set and temperatures drop.

This has been an unusual fall, as I now get to also anticipate the crunch-crunch-crunch of acorns being crushed by the tires of my neighbor's vehicle as it enters the driveway directly across my driveway. My neighbor has two large oak trees on both sides of his driveway.

After my neighbor parks his vehicle, he and I get to hear the plunk-plunk-plunk of acorns dropping on his vehicle, especially during windy weather. This has been a daily happening over the past several days. Each evening is replay of the previous evening. My neighbor is beginning to think that the supply of acorns is inexhaustible.

So why are oaks producing such an exceptional crop of acorns this year? Nut trees typically produce in an "on year – off year" pattern (also known as alternate year bearing). Pecan growers, including home growers with one or several pecan trees in the landscape, are well aware of this and use fertilizer and am-



PHOTO BY Dr. William M. Johnson

Oaks are producing an abundance of acorns this fall. Acorns on the driveway and in the beds of pickups are prompting some residents to wonder what's going on.

ple irrigation during dry spells to minimize the swings in yield.

Oak trees across Texas are producing huge crops of acorns. Oak trees tend to produce one bumper crop every two to seven years. The more common explanation for this year's heavy crop is the stress brought on by last year's drought conditions and other environmental conditions.

Most authorities indicate the reason is more complicated than drought conditions alone. Whatever factors influence a heavy acorn production year, they were at play this year as oaks in other regions of the U.S. (Including the New England area), are producing exceptional loads of acorns.

Yes, walking barefoot in a lawn populated with an overabundance of acorns would be challenging. My neighbor knows the shade provided by his oak trees during the heat of a warm summer more than offset an occasional nuisance such as acorns on the driveway. Most of us have appreciated the cooler temperature and gentle, refreshing breeze under a large shade tree on an otherwise hot, still day.

Trees in the landscape provide numerous aesthetic, environmental, and economic benefits, including increasing the value of a home and reducing air conditioning costs.

The value of trees in the home landscape reminds me of a story about two neighbors. A young father was raking



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leaves in his yard when he noticed his retired neighbor digging a hole. When asked what he was doing, the elderly gentleman told him he was planting a tree.

The young neighbor just smiled and chuckled to himself as he asked, "Why are you doing that? That tree won't be fully grown for 20 or 30 years, and you'll probably never benefit from it."

To that the elderly gentleman told his neighbor, "I know that, but aren't you glad that someone planted that tree in your front yard years ago so that you could enjoy its shade and so your kids can climb its stately limbs?" A sobering perspective indeed.

Whether you are putting in new trees or caring for existing trees, it's worth the time and effort to provide the proper management needed to produce healthy, vigorous growing trees.

Trees can provide the basic framework for any landscape plan. Gardeners should make plans to attend our upcoming educational program to become informed on the proper care of landscape trees (see inset).

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At A Glance

WHAT: Shade Trees in the Home Landscape: Selection, Planting and Care

WHEN: 9 a.m. - 11 a.m. Saturday.

OVERVIEW: Not everyone owns acres of forest trees, but most homeowners have one or more trees in the landscape. Commonly asked questions to the Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office are: What trees do best in this area? How far should I plant a tree from my house? Should this tree be removed? Should I have my tree topped? Do all trees have to be pruned? Heather McKnight, City Ar-

borist for the City of League City, will provide a PowerPoint presentation to discuss these and other questions on caring for trees in the home landscape, including Water Smart trees, mulching and preventing and reducing stress on trees.

PLACE: Galveston County AgriLife Extension Office located in Carbide Park (4102-B Main, La Marque). No fee but reservation required by e-mail (GALV3(at)wt.net) or phone (281-534-3413, Ext. 12).

