

Pump up the taste of hot peppers

Last year, I planted several varieties of peppers in one row. Perhaps I used too much cow manure and water, because all of the peppers tasted like sweet banana peppers. Even the jalapeño had no heat. Any advice?

P.H., Ponder

Cow manure probably is not the problem. Flavor is related to healthy soil that makes trace minerals available to plants.

This year, add these amendments to the beds: dry molasses, greensand, horticultural corneal and an organic fertilizer. (See Resources below to obtain instructions.)

The flavor and heat should improve. Keeping the soil a little on the dry side also should help increase the flavor, particularly with hot peppers.

I am building a house at Lavan Lake. I had the soil tested, and the analysis indicates that I need to add nitrogen and phosphorus. Is there any nitrogen or phosphorous I should stay away from?

K.C., Dallas

Do not use synthetic forms of nitrogen or phosphorus. You also can ignore that soil analysis.

The organic approach allows

ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT
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plants to get nutrients through the feeding and life cycles of microbes in the soil. We pay little to no attention to how many pounds of nutrients are applied per square foot. We try to use products that do the best job of providing and stimulating microbial activity.

So apply dry molasses now and then use an organic fertilizer such as those sold at garden centers and feed stores. Look for brands such as Bioform, Yum Yum Mix, Bradfield, Medina, Nature's Creation, Nature's Guide, Lady Bug, Perfectly Natural and others.

A nursery recently planted four bur oaks on our property. The employees recommended

Treegrator Slow Release Tree & Shrub Watering Bags for watering. Are these water bags harmful? The nursery also requires the use of a root stimulator in order to activate the one-year plant guarantee. The employee poured it on top of the roots full-strength and watered it in.

J.R., Dallas

If you are talking about a chemical root stimulator, I do not recommend it. It's usually a high-phosphorus fertilizer that isn't good for the soil, the beneficial fungi in the soil or the tree roots.

The only root stimulators I recommend are compost or Garrett Juice.

I also don't like water bags that hold moisture against the trunk and root flare of the tree. Trees that are planted and watered properly don't need water bags.

RESOURCES

ONLINE: www.dirtdoctor.com for free organic-program handouts

RADIO: KSKY-AM (660), Saturday 11 a.m.-noon and Sunday 8-11 a.m. www.ksky.com.

MAIL: P.O. Box 140650, Dallas, TX 75214

Feed your lawn, but test the soil first

By RICK ROSEN
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CHORES

If you haven't already fertilized your lawn, you should now. But how do you determine how much fertilizer to buy?

First thing to do: Measure your lawn. Get a tape measure and walk off each section of lawn. For example, measure your front yard on one side of your walkway. Then measure the other part. Continue around the house. Add up the measurements to get the total area of the lawn in square feet. You'll only have to do this task once; just keep the total-square-foot figure in a safe place so you can pull it out each year when it's time to buy fertilizer again.

If you can wait, there is another task that is vital to determining the correct amount: Get a soil test. The test takes about two weeks and shows the amount of nutrients in the soil, thus telling you which and how much to add.

Nitrogen is the most important nutrient for your lawn. Texas Cooperative Extension recommends using a fertilizer that represents a 4-1-2 ratio of nitrogen to phosphorus and potassium. Many local soils, according to the turf experts at Extension, already have enough phosphorus and potassium.

Organic garden stores sell bags of fertilizer with organic nutrients. For example, the store brand of fertilizer at Redenta's is a 5-3-2 product containing poultry litter, alfalfa, sulfate of potash, humates, molasses and seaweed extract. Redenta's sells bags of the individual organic nutrients, too.

Many organic experts emphasize building up your soil, rather than buying fertilizer, by leaving grass clippings on the lawn, top-dressing with compost and using other natural sources of nitrogen.

Paul Tukey, author of *The Organic Lawn Care Manual* (\$19.95, Storey Publishing, paperback) says: "The good news about all these natural products is the built-in safety net. Burning your lawn or harming the environment is difficult when you take synthetic fertilizer out of the equation. That's because the concentrations of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus are far lower with natural products. Some people may see this as a negative; it's not, though. Naturally occurring nutrients break down more slowly in the soil and therefore last longer."

GET A SOIL TEST KIT

Texas County Extension offices have the kits. Analysis fees range from \$10 to \$30. To obtain, call the Dallas office at 214-904-3050 or the Collin County office at 972-548-4233 (metro 972-424-1460, ext. 4233).

HOW MUCH FERTILIZER?

To calculate how much fertilizer to buy, based on amount of nitrogen, here's a chart prepared by Texas Cooperative Extension. The application depends on many factors, including type of grass, whether it is in shade, and more.

In the chart, the first number is the percentage of nitrogen, which is always the first number on a bag of fertilizer. The other two numbers, representing phosphorus and potassium, do not need to be considered in this equation.

FERTILIZER BAG READS	NITROGEN TO APPLY PER 1,000 SQ. FEET
6-X-X	8.3 lbs.
8-X-X	6.2 lbs.
9-X-X	5.5 lbs.
15-X-X	3.3 lbs.
20-X-X	2.5 lbs.
21-X-X	2.4 lbs.

As an example, take an 8-2-4 fertilizer:

Divide the amount of nitrogen you want to add (we're using 1/2 pound per 1,000 feet) by the percentage of nitrogen in the fertilizer (8 percent in this example).

Divide 0.5 (half of 1 is 0.5) by 0.08, which equals 6.25 pounds of fertilizer.

If, for example, your yard measures 3,000 square feet, divide 3,000 by the 1,000 square feet base measurement. That gives you 3. Multiply 3 by 6.25.

You get 18.75 pounds. So, to get enough nitrogen to apply 1/2 pound per 1,000 square feet of lawn, you would need to buy 18.75 pounds of the 8-2-4 fertilizer.

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Fertilizer calculator: To save time, let your computer do the calculations. You can access the Aggies' fertilizer calculator at DallasNews.com/home.



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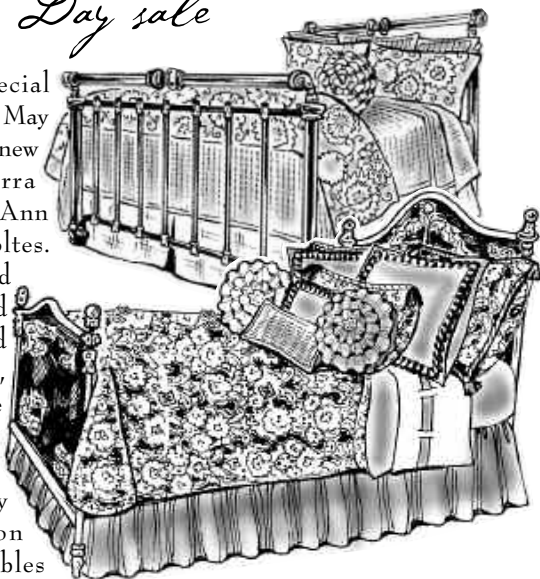
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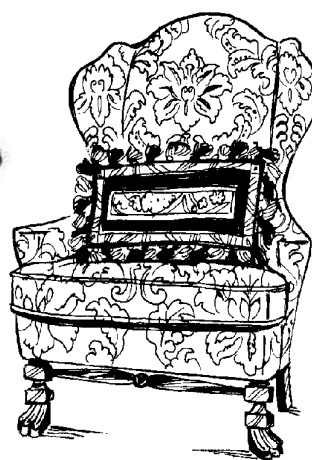
Trunk show and Mother's Day sale

Join us for this special event April 30 thru May 12, introducing all new bedding from Sferra Bros, Bella Notte, Ann Gish, & Nancy Koltes. Warm browns and spice, silver blue and chocolate toile, gold with pistachio floral, and soft champagne are some of the colors you will see on four new display beds. Save 20% on all bedding ensembles purchased during the trunk show as well as 20% on any Wesley Allen Iron Bed. Don't forget Mother's Day on May 13th. We will offer a 15% discount on all Lampe Berger lamps, refill oil, personal care items and loungewear. **Barklee Ltd.** in Preston Park Village, across from Chili's. Open 10-6, Mon.-Sat. 972-612-1935.



Trunk show

Our Pandora trunk show is just in time for Mother's Day. Treat Mom to the perfect piece of jewelry to start or add to her Pandora collection. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday, May 3. Visit **Travel Jewelry** in Preston Center at 6123 Berkshire Lane, 214-369-4722.



Celebrating spring

Spring is the time to freshen up your home inside and out. Rutherford's has just the furniture to help you get started. Create your own or select one of our new arrivals. Trims and fabrics also await. Our staff of designers are happy to assist with all your design needs. Additional parking in rear of building. **Rutherford's**, 5417 W. Lovers Lane. 214-357-0888

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WEDNESDAY

TASTE

COW COOKS: Two authors with new Texas cookbooks tell just what it means to cook like a cowboy or cowgirl.

NEXT WEEK

HOME

THE HIGH LIFE: A peek inside several residences on Turtle Creek reveals the glamour of a longtime prime address.

SHOP TALK

HOUSEWARMING: Robb & Stucky Interiors' new store opens with designer names at NorthPark. In today's Guide, Page 15

WATCH & LEARN

- Video: See why cupcake lovers are flocking to Sprinkles.
- Video: Watch chef Jason Foss of Amuse restaurant make Peanut Butter and Jelly Chocolate lollipops.
- Video: See bartender David Flores mix up a Sassy Sara at Tillman's Roadhouse in the Bishop Arts District.
- Video: Watch how Cork's innovative wine-sampling system works.

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