

Will sawdust harm my lawn?

I recently cut down a large fruitless mulberry tree in the front yard. This left quite a bit of sawdust on my St. Augustine lawn. Will this hurt the lawn?

T.M., Arlington

The sawdust doesn't need to be removed, but add nitrogen to counter the carbon in sawdust. Corn gluten meal or liquid seaweed would work well. Spread corn gluten meal at a rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet; follow label instructions for seaweed.

I have applied corn gluten meal to my yard, but it still has tons of weeds. How long will it take to get a nice green lawn?

D.O., Denton

The weeds you have now germinated last fall. Most of them will burn out after the weather gets hot. Just stick with an organic program. We have had unusual weather during the past year.

What do you know about a product called Messenger? Also, what is your stance on Garden-Ville's use of urea in organic fertilizers?

G.R., Georgetown

I have heard good things about Messenger, which is marketed by Eden Bioscience as a plant health activator. It is derived from protein and labeled as a

ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT
home@dallasnews.com

bio-pesticide. It fits an organic program.

I don't use products that contain urea, but it is the best choice of all the synthetic forms of nitrogen. It is used in small quantities in some products that are mostly organic.

A bad use of urea is in nitrogen-only products that have come on the market lately. They damage the soil, plant roots and the environment in general.

We have two Bradford pear trees in our yard. They have bloomed every year since we planted them nine years ago. But this year they did not bloom. I called a tree guy and he suggested fertilizing them, but he said we would not see results until next year. Why do you think some trees bloomed and some did not?

G.G., Dallas

Bradford pears have problems that include a bad branch structure, root diseases from

being planted too deep, chlorosis from trace mineral deficiencies and a short life span.

Stop using synthetic fertilizers and follow my Sick Tree Treatment. (See Resources to obtain details.)

I have looked in your books and other places and have not found how to prune a date palm. What is its scientific name? I'm having a problem with armadillos, too.

F.M., Plano

Phoenix dactylifera is the scientific name of the biblical date palm. The Canary Island date palm is *Phoenix canariensis*. I don't see many in North Texas.

Old, brown leaves should be removed from date palms for cosmetic reasons, but that's about all the pruning you need to do. Use pruning shears or a manual pruning saw if the dead frond is too tough for the shears.

If crushed red pepper flakes don't repel armadillos, you may need to trap and relocate them.

RESOURCES

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

HOME

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Features Editor: Cathy Barber
Home Editor: Mariana Greene
Assistant Editor: Misty Bailey
CONTACT US
Phone: 214-977-8834
E-mail: home@dallasnews.com
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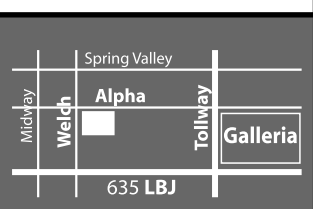
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CHORES



Recent rains have brought fire ants, packing a mean bite, to the soil's surface.

Bart Drees

Get those fire ants before they get you

By RICK ROSEN
Staff Writer
rosen@dallasnews.com

When the weather gets hot, it's time to put the heat on fire ants.

May through September is a good time to treat for them, because the ants actively forage for food then, according to Texas Cooperative Extension. The methods the Extension recommends in its Texas Two-Step Method depend on the ants being active.

And for those who don't want to use chemicals, there are treatments that both the Extension and organic experts agree on.

The Texas Two-Step Method: First, broadcast bait over the entire yard; second, treat individual mounds.

The baits act slowly but last a long time. The fastest-acting of them kill within 2 to 4 weeks, while those that use a growth regulator require 2 to 6 months for control. So, be patient.

The second step, treating individual mounds, involves faster-acting poisons. To limit the amount of chemicals you use, however, treat mounds only if you need immediate action. Alternatively, the Extension says, if you have only a few mounds, you can treat just the individual mounds instead of broadcasting baits.

Insecticides for individual mound treatments come in granular form, liquid concentrates, dusts and others. Nonchemical means include physically moving the ants with a shovel or pouring boiling water on them.

There also are naturally occurring insecticides, for broadcasting and for individual mounds. Those insecticides are in products that both chemical and organic gardeners could use.

One such bait that the Extension

NEXT WEEK IN HOME
Read about a neighborhood that's treating fire ants as a community project using the Texas Two-Step Method.

recommends contains spinosad as its active ingredient. It's a naturally occurring product that attacks the nervous system of fire ants and doesn't harm vertebrates. To treat individual mounds, organic gardeners can use products that contain d-limonene. D-limonene is an extract of orange oil that destroys the wax coating of the insect's respiratory system.

A big difference between baits and individual mound treatments is that baits generally are not watered in, while most of the mound treatments are. If rain falls within eight hours or so after the baits are applied, you have wasted your money.

The insecticides can be found at most garden centers and retail stores.

By the way, if the mounds are in out-of-the-way places, you may want to consider just leaving them alone. The ants are probably performing a service for you by keeping down the populations of more annoying insects, such as fleas.

FIRE ANT INFO

☞ **Link:** For more details about the Texas Cooperative Extension's Texas Two-Step program, visit fireants.tamu.edu.

WHAT WOULD THE DIRT DOCTOR DO?

On his Web site, www.dirtdoctor.com, organic expert Howard Garrett has a three-step program to control fire ants. He recommends:

- Drenching mounds with Liquid Fire Ant Control formula — "mix one part compost tea, 1 part molasses and one part orange oil. Mix 4-6 ounces of the concentrate per gallon of water."
- Treat the site with beneficial nematodes.
- Go completely organic with lawn care to create a biodiverse environment.

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