

The week ahead

TUESDAY HEALTHY LIVING

ROAD WELLNESS: Local athletes share tips for staying healthy while traveling.

WEDNESDAY TASTE

SLIDERS: Not the TV show; they're mini burgers, and they're getting big. Order them upscale or simple.

NEXT WEEK HOME

OUTDOOR SPACES: Corey Crawford designs stand-alone rooms for urban back yards.

Today on dallasnews.com

Turn right at the daffodils

Online: Spring, in the form of flower festivals, is bursting out all over Arkansas.

dallasnews.com/travel



A friend for Fifi and Fido

Online: A veterinarian offers tips for selecting a pet sitter.

dallasnews.com/pets

The new pantry

Online: Pantries are in vogue, riding the wave of kitchen upgrades.

dallasnews.com/home

HOME

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Trees: Get to the root of questions about fertilizing

By RICK ROSEN
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If your established trees aren't getting enough nutrients, fertilizer can provide them. Chances are, however, that your trees are doing fine without fertilizing.

Courtney Blevins, regional urban forester with the Texas Forest Service, says most established trees probably don't need to be fertilized. Only if the soil is deficient in some mineral should fertilizer be added.

To find out if the soil lacks one of the 17 essential plant elements, have your soil tested. Texas AgriLife Extension Service and private labs do this, generally for less than \$20.

The soil test will tell you whether your tree is getting what it needs.

Most tree roots are within 12 inches of the surface, and they generally extend way beyond the tips of the farthest-reaching branches.

Fertilizer not always best option

If your soil is fine, it's potentially harmful to the tree to fertilize. Also, wasted fertilizer can end up in the water supply. And, if you fertilize your lawn, you may already be putting more phosphorous or potassium into the soil than a tree needs.

If you do need to fertilize, deep-root injection is probably the way to go, Mr. Blevins says. ("Deep root" is a bit of a misnomer, because the roots being treated are usually within a foot of the surface.)

Some deep-root injectors also inject organic matter along with fertilizer. Be sure to ask the company you hire what it is

injecting into the soil, so you can be sure the microorganisms are being fed.

Bacteria, fungi and microorganisms in the soil convert organic matter into nutrients the tree can use. Trees, like other plants, can't use the nitrogen in the air; they get nitrogen from the soil.

Mulch provides most of the nutrients trees require, Mr. Blevins says. The organic matter in hardwood or other natural mulches gradually decomposes, providing food for the microorganisms in the soil. Mulch 2 to 3 inches deep and extend it as far from the tree trunk as you find visually pleasing, he says.

The bulk of research shows that fertilizing in fall is best, says Mr. Blevins. Spring feeding is good for a quick flush of growth. However, the tree won't have the opportunity to store the benefits and use them throughout the summer. Like a marathon runner in training, spring fertilizing is a quick burst of energy that won't last; fall feeding is more like building up the tree for the long term.

Should you fertilize young trees?

"The jury is still out on fertilizing newly planted trees," says Mr. Blevins. Heavy applications of fertilizer could burn and injure the root system. The trouble is, homeowners tend to think that if a little fertilizer is good, a lot of fertilizer is better.

Bottom line, says Mr. Blevins: "Always read label directions."

MORE ON SOIL TESTING

Forms, cost, how to collect soil samples:
<http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/webpages/forms.html>

WHERE TO GET SOIL TEST KITS

You can get bags and forms at county AgriLife Extension Service offices, or send a legal-size, self-addressed, stamped envelope and you will be mailed the forms.

Dallas County:
10056 Marsh Lane Suite B-101, Dallas TX 75229-6071; 214-904-3050

Collin County:
825 N. McDonald St., Suite 150, McKinney, TX 75069-2175; 972-548-4233

Denton County:
Denton Government Center, 306 N. Loop 288, Suite 222, Denton, TX 76209-4887; 940-349-2882

Tarrant County:
200 Taylor, Suite 500, Fort Worth, TX 76102-7308; 817-884-1945

Which comes first: the bench or the tree?

I want to put a tree in my back yard and build a 3-foot-tall bench around it. How should this be done? Should I build the bench and plant the tree at the top of the soil inside the circular bench, or plant the tree at ground level and build the bench around it, then fill the center area with soil?

B.W., Aubrey

The first idea, building a raised planter, is the best way to go. Adding soil around the trunk of a tree after building a bench eventually would kill the tree.

My mother has a camellia that is more than 10 years old and has mold or something growing on the undersides of its leaves. What should she do?

C.H., Cumby

Spray the camellia with a product called Plant Wash to control the disease organisms. Then use my Sick Tree Treatment to prevent the problem from recurring. (See Resources to obtain instructions.)

It sounds as if the camellia was planted too deep, and the bed probably was not prepared correctly.

We have a severe infestation of a round-leaved weed that produces clusters of burs. We have burned some of the plants and raked and

ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT
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disposed of the remains. Is there a pre-emergent herbicide that will keep these weeds from coming up this spring?

R.W., Fort Worth

Grass burs and other annual weeds can be controlled with corn gluten meal applied now at a rate of 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Dry molasses spread at a rate of 10 to 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet will increase the control.

The long-term solution is to increase the humus in the soil. Humus contains a natural acid that prevents many weed seeds from germinating.

My live oak is about 15 years old and was healthy until recently, when my neighbors hired someone to remove all the tree's roots and branches that extended onto their

property. One arborist told me not to waste money on deep-root feeding. What would you recommend? A nursery employee recommended using your sick tree granular product in conjunction with horticultural cornmeal.

N.T., Keller

I agree that deep-root feeding would be useless because the fertilizer would be injected beneath the feeder roots, which basically are in the top few inches of soil. Shallow-root or "root zone" feeding would be beneficial if organic fertilizers are used. Synthetic fertilizers would be a bad idea.

Using my entire Sick Tree Treatment, not just one product by that name, would be the best thing to do. (See Resources to obtain instructions.)

You may continue to have a problem when the tree revives and grows across the property line again. The neighbors have the right to keep your tree off of their property, but they don't have a right to injure the part of the tree that is on your property.

RESOURCES

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

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Easter comes early this year, so it's time to start thinking about your holiday table. And there's no place like Dishes from the Past to help. Elegant Waterford pieces include highballs, brandy snifters and beautiful bowls. Wedgwood Queensware, hard-to-find pieces of Fostoria American and Spode Chinese Rose are new on the shelves this week. Whether it's replacement pieces of china or crystal you need, or a complete new look for your table, the girls at Dishes are ready to make it happen. P.S. — once you come to our store you'll be hooked. **Dishes from the Past** — 3701 Lovell in Fort Worth, 817-737-6390 and 1-800-984-8801. Open 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Mon. to Sat. www.dishesfromthepast.com.



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Forestwood's Spring Sale

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Forestwood Antique Mall, 5333 Forest Lane, Dallas. Open daily from 10 a.m. - 7 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. 972-661-0001.



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