

“Ask The Plant Groom”™ by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom™

For: QA1027

I have an area in my lawn that is turning brown even though I water well. Is this brown patch and if so what do I apply? - G. H.

This time of year brown patch is not a problem in Texas lawns.

Your most likely problem is a very small insect pest known as chinch bug. These tiny pests actually suck vital juices out of grass tissue and when this occurs the grass under impact will lose color, brown and decline.

Hot, dry and full sun locations in our lawns are what this pest prefers. Check the area of your lawn in the transition zone between brown and green grass for these critters. It will take some hands and knees looking. Look in and among the grass blades for a very small and fast moving black insect.

A long used method of detection is removing the top and bottom out of a metal can such as 1lb. of coffee and press one edge into the soil approximately 1” deep. Fill the can with water and if small black insects with a white spot on their bodies are observed, then chinch bug is most often identified. I suggest capturing a couple of these suspects, place in a container and visit your local garden center to confirm your find.

There are several aids to control chinch bugs at retailers. After selecting your control product/aid be sure to read and follow label directions.

My crape myrtles are not blooming like those in our neighborhood and I see throughout the city. Why and what can I do about it? Thanks. – R. K.

Here are some possibilities on why your beauties aren’t putting on the show you think they should.

- As with most blooming plants there are different bloom times due to varieties. Some varieties bloom early while others may begin blooming mid or late season.
- Crape myrtles bloom best on new growth. If your plants produced limited growth this season total bloom count will be reduced. I recommend an application of high

- (N) nitrogen fertilizer applied according to label directions just as new spring growth begins. This action will help to produce more new growth each season.
- Full sun is required for optimum growth and bloom of crape myrtles. If your plant in question is not in full sun relocate this Dec. or Jan. or remove the shade.
 - Severely cutting back crape myrtles not only butchers the plants but also delays bloom. Stop cutting back your plants if this has been your current cultural practice. Crape myrtles DO NOT have to be pruned. And never, ever, ever cut them back. It runs their natural shape. If short plants are desired ... plant low growing varieties.

For everyone: DO NOT, DO NOT, DO NOT, DO NOT cut crape myrtles back!!!

Dale's Notes:

- NOW is tomato planting time in Texas for our fall vegetable gardens. Yes it is hot, but it's always "warm" in Texas during July. And, it's still tomato planting time.
- Be observant of landscape plants installed this spring and summer for their watering needs. While a recently developed bed may indicate sufficient moisture with a finger inserted into the mix a plant's actual ball of soil and roots may not have adequate moisture. Always check the actual soil ball to make sure it is moist. This test is critical on recently installed landscape plants in TX landscapes and includes – trees, shrubs, groundcovers, vines, annuals, roses, perennials and any other plant material installed in 2005.
- The very best time of day to water is early morning with the goal to have watering completed by 10am. Do not water in midday. Mid day watering will result in as much as 50% water loss due to evaporation before ever reaching target plants root systems. And, you will pay for all the water.
- This time of year mulching really demonstrates its' value. If your plants are not mulched as we have constantly suggested with 3-4" of a favorite bark mulch ... do so now. Apply 3-4" between all plants and especially cover their root systems.
- Next time you plan a landscape bed or other planting do look for and utilize Water Wise plants. Water Wise plants after establishment become what my Granny Miller in her old Indian Creek, TX country cottage garden called ... "a thrifty plant". The meaning? "A thrifty plant will go a long way on a little water", Lillie Victoria Miller, Indian Creek, TX, circa 1950.
- Now is a great time to visit retail garden centers, public parks, arboreta, botanic gardens and our streets and roads to look at, photograph and log the names of crape myrtles you personally prefer. This is also an acceptable time to plant these puppies IF and it's a big if you are going to be able to supply sufficient moisture for their establishment.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist -Dallas County, Author, Columnist, Radio/TV Host is known state wide as The Plant Groom™. Dale will answer your lawn, garden and landscape questions by sending them to dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net.

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