

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

For: QA1054

Since we have had such a mild winter, should I apply my pre-emergent earlier than usual? I generally put it out from mid to late February. I understand ideal ground temp for pre-emergent is about 50 degrees, (though I'm not sure how you gauge the temperature of the ground). I'm concerned about early weed germinations with the mild temps we've been having.

What do you suggest? - K. R.

It's difficult to advise a specific time frame when weather conditions are unusual especially when temperatures are higher than the historic average.

The council is this. For pre-emergents to provide “best results” they must be applied prior to seed germination and target the specific weed types. If you wish to prevent non grassy or broad leaf weeds make sure the aid you select targets these specific weed types. If the main issue is grassy weeds such as crab grass for example the same suggestion applies. Make sure the product utilized targets crab grass if that's what you want to prevent.

All pre-emergents should be applied prior to weed seed germination. Do we have a specific time when this will begin? The answer is, not at this time. Best guesstimate on when to apply? NOW through mid Feb., but no guarantees.

Remember, when utilizing any gardening aid - always read and follow label directions when applying.

Soil temperatures may be measured with a simple thermometer available at heating/air conditions supplies firms and in the kitchen tools sections of home centers, hardware stores and other retailers. Most are stainless steel with a direct readable scale and probe. They may be used to take the internal temperatures for food preparations also.

I have long been wanting to plant some crepe myrtle trees or bushes. They bloom all thru the summer and have some beautiful fall colors. What time of the year is the best to plant them, is there any special types that I should try, and are there any tips you could share to assure a good start for them? I really prefer the red blooms. I've also noticed that some are bigger than others. What can you tell me? about crepe myrtles?

Enjoy your column. - O. M.

Crape Myrtles may be planted anytime of the year. The best time for planting is Oct. - Dec. and second best is early spring.

Crape myrtles are very Water Wise and Earth Kind in the landscape. Once established, they require minimum maintenance including very little water.

To do well long term these beauties need:

- Day long full sun
- Good air movement
- Well drained soil

Colors range from dark red to pale pink, dark - light purple, blends and white. Depending upon variety, heights are available from miniatures for hanging basket to 35' tall tree types.

I recommend letting the retailers know where ever you shop your specific requirements to better insure you are purchasing the plants desired. Example. If you are looking for a prolific solid white blooming variety that will grow 35+ feet tall or red in the 10 - 12' range state these requirements at the retailers.

My Bradford pear tree's leafs turned brown and started falling off in June of last year. It looks as if it died. The tree is about 15 years old. I haven't noticed any bugs. What do you suggest? - K. H.

It sounds like a case of cotton root rot. Mature trees may terminate at any age if cotton root rot hits them.

To confirm or eliminate this possibility you may want to send in samples of the tree's root system to the Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab at Texas A & M. Send a long stamped and self addressed envelope to my office with your request and we'll send you and anyone else wanting one a free copy of the form needed to send with a suspected diseased sample for testing.

The address is Plant Disease Form, Dale Groom, 10056 Marsh Lane, Suite B-101, Eustace, TX 75229.

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