

Ask The Plant Groom(tm) by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom(tm)

For: QA1076

I have some white to very light grey colored growth on the back of some leaves on our holly planting. What is it? Is it harmful to the plants and if so, what should be done about it? –J. M.

It sounds like your holly has a critter problem known as scale. I have problem with scale too, my bathroom scale because of the numbers it indicates when I visit it. I think I'll stop visiting the thing.

Scale insects suck "juices" from their host plants. This is not a positive condition for holly. However, it is usually of relatively low to moderate impact. It does look ... ugly.

Good news. Scale on holly and other ornamental landscape plants are usually easy to control. Here's how. Apply dormant oil during the dormant season according to label directions. Pay close attention to the back side of your plants' leaves. Do make sure they are covered with the spray.

If you wish to have your problem identified before any treatment take a sample to your local agent of Texas Cooperative Extension. Their phone numbers are in your directory under the County listings. Offices are normally open 8a – 4:30p, M –F. If you have difficulty in locating your Agent send me an e-mail at dalegroom@mycvc.net and I'll send your local Agent's number back to you. If you wish to call my office for the number it is 214-903-3050.

I have two questions.

When is the best time to cut back our roses?

This past season we had some crepe myrtles that would produce buds but would not open. Why, and what can we do this year to help them?

Thank you. - G. K.

A good time to prune back shrub and bush roses is mid February. Think of romance, Valentines Day and roses, a great combination.

Running, leaning or climbing rose varieties are not pruned back severely as shrub and bush roses. Minimum pruning to retain their shape or direct their growth habit is recommended.

Now is not a good time to severely prune roses.

For Texas gardeners intimidated concerning trying to grow roses plant varieties in the 'Earth Kind' group. More information on Earth Kind Roses is available at <http://aggie-horticulture@tamu.edu/earthkindrose>.

Crepe myrtles need day long full sun to do their best job of blooming. They also bloom best on new growth.

Insects including aphids which are sometime called plant lice and a disease known as powdery mildew may impact blooms.

Learn to identify aphids and powdery mildew and if either is observed control with appropriate aid(s) according to label directions.

New growth may be enhanced by applying a high 1st number (N)nitrogen lawn fertilizer according to label directions as new growth begins in the spring.

If your plants are not receiving a minimum of 8hours full sun each day prune trees to allow adequate sunlight if they are creating a shortage in sunlight. An option should the plants be relatively small is to dig and relocate to a sunny location.

We live in a rural area and would like to plant some plants around our home that do not need to be watered often and are easy to take care of. What do you suggest? Thanks. - K. D.

Some specific plants we grow around our rural home include: Carolina jasmine, cross vine, Nellie R. Stevens holly, willow leaf holly, yaupon holly, lantana, 'Lady In Red' salvia, several varieties of crape myrtles that are mildew resistant including 'Natchez', nandina – domestica, compacta, 'Bar Harbor' and 'Fire Power', pomegranate, loquat, American beautyberry, Texas sage and salvia greggii. Once established, these plants have been very low maintenance and are seldom watered.

We recently moved into a beautiful home in the middle of a wheat field. We have a few old, large trees around the house. The yard we mow is a combination of mostly weeds and prairie grasses with a little Bermuda and a little St. Augustine in patches. How do I even begin to get rid of the weeds and end up with only Bermuda and St. Augustine? - S. B..

Congratulations on your move!

I'd first mow and trim all the grass and weeds you have. Secondly, have a soil analysis done to determine the nutrient contents of your soil plus its' pH. You may send a long self addressed envelope with two first class stamps on it to Dale Groom, Soil Text Kit, 10056 Marsh Lane, Suite B-101. Dallas, TX 75229 and we will send you the FREE kit.

The third suggestion is to trim/prune your trees or have a professional do this for you. DO NOT hire anyone that wants to "top" your trees. NEVER, EVER TOP TREES!!! Properly pruned trees will allow more light to reach your lawn areas.

After the tree pruning is completed review the areas for sunlight. Bermuda grass requires full sun or no shade to do its' best long term. While St Augustine grass will grow in shady areas it too needs some sun. A minimum of 4 hours full sun or 8 hours 50% sun/50% shade mix will both be adequate. DO NOT attempt to grow it in total shade. In total shade grow one or more selections of groundcovers.

If you are sure new grass needs to be planted it may be done now. Properly fertilized, mown and irrigated St. Augustine and Bermuda grasses will squeeze nearly all weeds ... out.

Dale Groom, CEA Horticulture, Native Texan, Columnist, Radio/TV Host, Author is also known state wide as The Plant Groom(tm). Send your questions to dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net. If you wish to speak to a Master Gardener for free horticultural issues help M-F, 8:30am - 4pm dial 214-904-3053.

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