

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

QA1083

I live in Central Texas and planted two varieties of figs (5 trees) about 7 years ago. I was very pleased with the crops for the fourth and fifth years, but now the trees are almost 15 feet tall and very difficult to pick. I know that peach trees do well with flat-top pruning during the off-season both for air circulation and ease of harvest. Will figs do as well or will it hurt fruit production?

Thanks - MW

Here's the deal. Yes, fruiting figs can be cut back and growth directed. Because they are sometimes cold/frost sensitive the best time to do this action is in late winter/early spring just as new growth begins.

Yes, your overall production may be down the 1st year. It is up to you to decide if you want to lower the height for ease of harvesting and perhaps reduce the harvest amount a little or leave them tall and potentially harvest more fruit with difficulty. The best production occurs on recent growth so a shorter bushy plants may produce more than a relatively tall leggy specimen.

These same suggestions apply in North, South, West and East Texas as well as Central Texas.

My problems are I have a fence that's 6 feet tall and 80 feet long across my back yard. This fence is made of 2 inch pipe and welded wire. I have a 6 ft" wide planting bed in front of the fence, that is in full sun. Behind the fence is a coastal pasture. Last spring I planted two Honeysuckle plants one at each end and wanted them to run on the fence. They were not Japanese as suggested in your book. I could not find that variety. The honeysuckles were eaten by grasshoppers. I also planed a wisteria vine in a different location, it was also eaten.

Could you suggest a good strong vine for me to plant on this fence, so my backyard can have some type of boundary form the pasture. I am not a big fan of orange and do not want to try an old fashion trumpet, unless that is my last resort.

Thanks for any help you might give me. – S. M.

Honeysuckle will run on all types of fences whether it is Hall's, green, Japanese purple or coral. Another vine you may wish to consider is Carolina Jessamine. Crossvine is an additional selection to take a look at.

At our rural home the soil is deep sand. I grow Carolina Jessamine/Jasmine, coral honeysuckle, purple passion vine and crossvine and enjoy them all.

I suggest keeping your selections mulched well 3-4" deep with your favorite bark mulch. If you haven't fertilized in recent weeks apply a high 1st number lawn fertilizer according to label directions. And, supply moisture when needed. This should increase the growth rate of your selections.

Grasshoppers are ... tough in rural areas. Treat as needed to control these unwelcome visitors with products labeled specifically for grasshoppers.

My assistance is available FREE to anyone M - F from 8:30am - 4:00pm at 214-904-3050.

I have a concern about oleander; I gave a plant to a neighbor as a housewarming gift. Later they asked me if I had heard anything about the plant being toxic. They have two small children ages 7 and 4 and we are concerned about this possibility. Could you please tell us if this is a dangerous situation so we can correct it if necessary?  
Thank you. M & B. J.

All parts of oleanders are toxic. However, other landscape plants are also toxic in varying degrees.

The prime emphasis should be teaching children..."do not put anything, that's anything in your mouth unless Mom or Dad says its OK".

Oleanders are very heat and drought tolerant once established and great "bloomers" in full sun locations. They may have some issues with winters in other locations in TX other than the Gulf coast. Visit Port Lavaca sometime and look at these beauties there.

Bottom line? It's up to you or anyone else to plant oleander or not. If the decision is to plant DO teach children to leave them alone.

Dale's Water Wise Tip: Continue to maintain an organic mulch 3-4" deep around all root systems, water early morning and only when the plants need a ... drink.

Dale Groom-Extension Horticulturist, Master Gardener Coordinator-Dallas County, Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas A & M University System, Native Texan, Columnist, Author, Radio/TV Host is also known state wide as The Plant Groom(tm). Send your horticultural related questions to Dale at [dalegroom@mycvc.net](mailto:dalegroom@mycvc.net). You may speak directly with a Certified Master Gardener an 214-904-3053 M-F, 8:30a - 4pm.

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