

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

For: QA1062

Is now the best time to prune our shrubs? We have several that are overgrown and need to reduce their size. Thank you. – N. N.

This is the ideal time to prune all evergreen shrubs we normally utilize in the landscape including hollies and nandinas. Wait until spring blooming is complete on azaleas, Indian hawthorne and similar selections before pruning.

Summer blooming shrubs that need selective pruning such as abelia may be pruned now. Be aware that junipers should never be pruned back into woody areas without leaves. Most junipers do not regrow when pruned in this manner.

The best pruning tool is a sharp bypass hand pruner. For larger limbs use a sharp bypass lopper and/or sharp pruning saw. Do not use anvil pruners or loppers or hedge shears. Note: It is not necessary to apply pruning paint.

To help regrowth an application of (N) nitrogen to the soil may be advised. Should you decide to apply (N) do so according to label directions.

If you wish to have a soil test conducted to determine your soil's nutrient contents including (N) you may contact any County office of Texas Cooperative Extension for free soil test sample containers and instruction sheets. If you prefer, our office will send you a free Soil Test Kit. Here's how to receive one. Send your request and include a long self addressed envelope with two 1st class stamps (SSAE) on it to; Dale Groom, Soil Test Kit, Texas Cooperative Extension, 10056 Marsh Lane, Suite B-101, Dallas, TX 75229. Upon receiving your request and SSAE we will send you the kit by mail.

Being new homeowners and our first time to plant landscape plants what should be done to our soil before planting? – H. N.

Congratulations on the new home.

Landscape bed preparation is vital to obtain maximum results in nearly all the landscape and garden plants we grow. In previously non-improved clay soils of any color to create an Earth Kind™ planting bed till in 3" of expanded shale and 3' of finished (ready to use) plant derived compost. Apply these ingredients 1" per pass with the tiller starting with expanded shale and crown the bed 6-9". In sandy soils do not use expanded shale but do increase the compost to 6".

This amended and crowned (higher in the center and sloped to the bed edges) planting bed creates the desirable physical conditions for healthy root growth. Healthy roots grow healthy plants.

It is vital that recommended soil conditions be created prior to planting if maximum growth, health, production and vigor are the goals.

Summer is coming and so are the grasshoppers. For the past two years I have used the No-Lo bait (The flakes you sprinkle in the garden when the grasshoppers are young) with no success. I hate seeing my flowers and bushes being eaten overnight. Sort of getting guinea hens, what else can I do? Thanks. – D. H.

D. H.,

This is such an important question for many homeowners/gardeners I asked and received counsel from a friend and colleague, Dr. Mike Merchant, Professor and Extension Urban Entomologist, Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas A & M University System. The following is his specific response and recommendations:

“Grasshopper populations have been declining the past few summers (though possibly not in your neighborhood), so this may not be as big an issue for you this year. No-Lo baits, as you've observed, are ineffective at preventing large nymphal grasshoppers and adults from damaging landscape plants. The best insecticide treatments are some of the newer residual sprays such as cyfluthrin, lambda-cyhalothrin, and bifenthrin. For more information, see my fact sheet at <http://citybugstamu.edu/FastSheets/Ent-1040.asp>”

I have visited the site, printed the Fact Sheet and recommend you also follow Mike's suggestions.

Note: To all reading this column, there is no charge/fee for Mike's Fact Sheet on grasshopper control. I recommend you visit the site, print a copy and save in a folder. If you have friends, neighbors, fellow 'gardeners', relatives or anyone else you think may benefit from this information print them a copy too or at a minimum provide the specific Internet address. This is accurate and reliable information we can all utilize at its very best.

Dale's Notes:

- Get your soil analyzed ... NOW.
- Mow all your lawn's winter weeds low.
- Mulch all landscape beds 3-4" deep with your favorite plant material mulch product.
- Check irrigation systems for proper operation including even water distribution.
- Clean and sharpen hand tools especially those used for pruning.
- Plant warm season color.
- If needed, shade trees may be pruned.
- Plant warm season lawn grasses.
- Plan and plant to conserve and be ... Water Wise in your landscape and gardening activities this year.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist-Dallas County, Texas Cooperative Extension, Native Texan, Columnist, Author, Radio/TV/Host is also known statewide as The Plant Groom. Dale will answer your lawn, garden and landscape questions here in his column. Send your questions to Dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net.

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