

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office



PHOTO BY Loretta Osteen

As a rule of thumb, palm fronds should never be removed before they have completely or mostly turned brown. The horizontal outline of palm canopies, for most species, should minimally start at the 9 o'clock position and extend over to the 3 o'clock position. Excessive pruning over time will eventually weaken a palm and may cause premature death of the tree.

Q: My pecan trees have produced a heavy crop load this year. The crop load is so heavy that some branches have broken. Will my pecan trees be able to carry the nut crop to maturity?

A: Pecans across the county have set a remarkably heavy nut crop. That's good news given that most pecans have not set a decent

crop since Hurricane Ike devastated pecan production in 2008.

A heavy pecan crop will often lead to broken limbs or branches due to the weight of the pecans. Trees with a heavy crop of pecans are more likely to sustain broken branches when heavy rainfall occurs with windy conditions.

Late July through Sep-

tember is known as the kernel fill stage and adequate soil moisture during this time is of critical importance. The root system of a pecan tree is at least twice the width of a tree's canopy. During extended periods of dry weather, irrigate pecan trees to encourage maximum production.

Each irrigation should be sufficient to thor-



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oughly moisten the soil to a depth of 8-to-10 inches. The water needs of large trees with a heavy nut crop can be 2 inches or more per week during August and September. To avoid runoff, this can mean irrigating twice a week during dry spells. If lawn grasses are under the trees competing for water, additional water will be needed to compensate.

Large pecan trees require the highest degree of consistent watering during late summer to early fall. The first half of September is an especially critical period for nut production. Provide plenty of supplemental irrigation to pecan trees at this time of year to produce a nut crop to maturity.

One drawback to such heavy watering is the restriction on water use in some areas. Another drawback is the water bill from heavy watering can drain your pocketbook and add to the cost of production.

Q: The bark on my crape myrtles is peeling off and it looks like it has been shredded and just hangs off the trunk and some of the lower branches. Is this normal?

A: As crape myrtles age, the bark will begin to peel off. The horticultural term for this is exfoliating. This is normal and there is no cause for alarm. After the gray bark peels away, you may notice a different shade of underbark. Some of the newer varieties have colors that are cin-

amon to dark brown in color. This colorful underbark adds to the beauty of a crape myrtle especially in the winter.

Q: I see some palm trees on Galveston Island that have been extensively pruned back with only a few leaves remaining. Other palms are not pruned at all. How should palms be pruned?

A: Several palm species retain their leaves (fronds), after they have turned brown. It is common practice to see folks prepare palms for possible storms by pruning off all but a few of the upper fronds. This practice is very harmful to the tree as most palms produce only a few dozen fronds per year.

These older fronds often are removed by landscapers for aesthetic concerns. However, palms naturally translocate nutrients from older fronds to the younger fronds which can deprive the tree of needed nutrients.

In some municipalities and counties of Florida, it is illegal to remove fronds that are not completely brown. This practice will eventually weaken the palm and may cause premature death of the tree. To avoid problems associated with over-pruning, remove only dead (completely brown) leaves, and do not remove fronds that are held above a 9 o'clock to 3 o'clock horizontal line.

There is no need to extensively prune palms in preparation for a possible hurricane as most

palms are native to the tropics and have already evolved modifications that enable them to successfully weather most storms. The open feather like structure of their leaves allows wind to pass through them easily and their trunks are strong but flexible allowing them to bend but not break.

Most palms produce only a few dozen leaves or less per year. The removal of even a few green fronds greatly diminishes the photosynthetic capacity of the plant. This denies the palm the food it needs to grow.

Palm fronds should never be removed before they have completely turned brown or mostly turned brown. Continued removal of green fronds over time will often result in a condition known as pencil-top or a drastic decline in trunk diameter.

