

JUNE'S GARDENING QUESTIONS

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Cicadas are insects best known for the distinctive sounds made by male cicadas. Dog day cicadas will be seen and heard in many area landscapes over the next few weeks of summer and do not pose any harm to humans.

Question: I have webworms on my mulberry tree. Where do they come from? Are there any effective chemical controls available?

Answer: Webworms are aptly named as they form protective spider-like webs that cover the tips of branches where they feed.

Webworms are covered with an abundance of long hairs and their bodies are yellow or greenish-yellow in color.

Mulberry trees are their favorite host plant with pecan trees ranking a close second. However, except for pines and other conifers, webworms will settle

for having just about any landscape tree or shrub for dinner. While walking along a street on Monday on Galveston Island, I noticed the leaves of some plumeria plants that had several webworms feeding on them. There's a first time for everything, and this was



my first instance of observing webworms feeding on plumeria leaves.

Sevin and malathion are recommended chemical controls. Effective control is also achieved with the use of Dipel and Bio-Worm Killer, both of which are biological or organic-type alternatives. Because the webs produced by the webworms are resistant to water penetration, the addition of a wetting agent (available at garden centers) to the spray mixture is highly recommended. Some homeowners have used mild liquid soaps (such as Dawn or Ivory) as a wetting agent. This works well in most instances, but it may cause some burning of leaves, especially when applied in the heat of day during hot weather.

Since the adult stage of webworms is a moth, be on guard for succeeding generations of webworms. Just because you take care of the problem now, you may still have another generation to deal with later. In fact, you should be on the lookout for webworms from now through the fall season.

Question: Do you recommend use of fertilizer spikes around landscape trees?

Answer: While fertilizer spikes will not harm landscape trees, I do not recommend their use. Fertilizer spikes provide a concentration of nutrients in a limited area while not providing any nutrients in the remaining area. The roots of most trees extend out as far as the limbs (known as the drip line) and in many cases, extend out much farther than

the limbs. Tree roots that absorb water and nutrients are also distributed fairly uniformly under a tree's drip line. I recommend use of a complete fertilizer (such as 15-5-10 or 13-13-13) that is spread uniformly around the tree at the drip line.

Question: How do I deal with all these sprouts coming up from the base of my crape myrtle trees? Can I spray something on them?

Answer: Forget using any weed killers. That may harm the mother tree. Trimming them off throughout the summer is the best way to slow them down. Prune the sprouts close to the trunk. Keep this up all summer and you will slowly win this battle.

Question: Several of my trees have low hanging branches that are in my way when I mow. Do I need to wait until winter to remove them?

Answer: Go ahead and remove the objectionable limbs. Summer pruning of small-diameter, low-hanging branches is safe. The important thing to remember is not to remove the branch collar which looks like a swollen area where the base of the limb attaches to the trunk. Also, make a clean cut.

I strongly recommend that all other major pruning activities be postponed until December through January while trees are in a state of dormancy. No painting of the pruned site is required or recommended.

Question: Cicadas are starting to

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sing in my home landscape. Are the cicadas in our area the same type as the cicadas on the East coast? Are they harmful to my trees?

Answer: Cicadas are insects and best known for the sounds made by male cicadas. Females do not sing.

All cicada species have an unusually complex life cycle. These insects spend most of their lives (from two to 17 years depending on the species) underground feeding on roots of trees. The cicada that occurs in Texas Upper Gulf Coast landscapes is closely related to the cicada that occurs along the East coast but they are distinct species. Most cicadas in this area are known as dog day cicadas whereas the most common cicada that occur in eastern regions is the periodical cicada.

Our dog day cicada is larger than their eastern cousins. The periodical cicada species that blanketed many regions along the East coast during June completes their life cycle in 17 years and emerges in large numbers (known as broods) whereas our dog day cicadas are more sporadic in occurrence and have life cycles of two to five years. Some periodical cicada species occur in Texas and they complete their life cycles in 13 years and unlike the East coast species, some emerge almost every year.

Although the dog day cicada does feed on tree roots, it does not inflict any significant damage.