

Producing Pecans in Middle Georgia

Georgia is the number one pecan producing state in the U.S. We have a lot of commercial pecan acreage in our area – and a lot of yard trees. Many gardeners have hopes of getting lots of pecans from their trees. Unfortunately, they are often disappointed. Pecans growing in yards do not always produce nuts. Insects and diseases may keep nuts from filling out or make them fall before they mature.

What can we do to cure this? Not much. The trees are too large to spray and the chemicals we would use may be too toxic or hard to get. Home gardeners cannot expect a pecan crop every year. However, a few tips may make the trees more useful and productive.

Fall is a good time to plant pecan trees. Select the varieties that the University of Georgia recommends for disease and insect resistance. Select the site carefully. Grow them in full sun and well away from houses and parking places. The aphids on the trees sometimes exude a sticky substance that can make vehicles and houses sticky and dirty.

Limbs may be heavy with nuts in the fall. Some pecan branches may even break. There is nothing you can do to prevent limb breakage except to prune limbs or thin out some of the nuts. Prune lower limbs so you can mow around the tree. We call these lower limbs “headache limbs” since this is what they cause when you try to mow close to the tree. A better option may be to replace the grass around the tree with mulch. This will help the tree to get water and nutrients and reduce your mowing headaches.

We often use a herbicide to kill the grass around trees before we apply mulch. Do not spray heavily around the pecan tree with Round Up to kill the grass. If you soak the soil around the tree with Round Up, it can get into the roots of the pecan and damage the tree. When using Round Up around trees, use it lightly. Wet only the leaves of the plant you want to kill, not the soil.

Pecan nuts will shed, sometimes for no apparent reason. Some varieties are worse than others. Once again, there is little you can do to prevent this. Rake up leaves and pick up limbs just before harvest. This should make it easier to find the nuts. If you see nuts with holes bored into them, contact your Extension agent for instructions on how to control pecan weevils. This is one pecan insect the home gardener can try to control.

Pecans like lots of water as they fill their nuts. During the last two weeks of August, water the tree once a week with one to three inches of water. When watering, supply enough to wet the soil twelve to eighteen inches deep. Let the soil dry out between watering. Roots kept too wet can die. Do not water more often than once a week or whenever the soil dries out - whichever is less often. Fertilize pecan trees in February and perhaps again in June. Soil sample and add lime if needed to raise the soil pH.

Proper care may help this year’s crop and next year’s also. Pecan trees prepare flower buds the year before a crop. Care now may result in a better crop next year.