

What You Need To Know About Pecans

Dear Plant Doctor: Help!
I have done everything anyone has told me to do but my pecans were the same as always this year. I wrote to N.C. State before my husband died but never heard from them (I may not have written to the right address). So, I thought I would ask YOU.

My pecan tree is 22 years old, abt. at 50 feet tall, and is always full of tassels. The pecan nuts come, but the problem is, they are faulty. The shell looks the same as a good nut, but when you crack them open, the meat is shriveled and dried up.

In past years, I have buried cans of lye at the edge of the branches or fertilized with special pecan fertilizer. I still continue to have bad nuts.

I would appreciate your opinion. It is a beautiful tree, has lots of nuts but none fit to use. I read your column every week. Thank you.

Jacksonville, NC
Dear Plant Doctor: Please write a column about growing pecans. I have several trees in my yard that I cannot get to produce nuts. The trees are about 10 years old. Where can I get some good information about these trees?

Stedman, NC
Growing Pecans
Answer: You have written to the right place now!

The pecan (*Carya illinoensis*) is the largest native North American member of the hickory group in the Walnut family (*Juglandaceae*). Pecans and hickories are so closely related that hickory-pecan species hybrids have been reported for over 100 years. Hybrids (often called *hicans*) can still be purchased in most large nurseries.

Ethnobotanists speculate that selection for thin-shelled pecan types

THE PLANT DOCTOR
C. BRUCE WILLIAMS
Extension Area
Turf Specialist



began thousands of years ago by the native American peoples. Modern varieties (some of which are nearly 100 years old) such as Stuart, Desirable, Cape Fear, Elliott, Cherokee, Wichita, Candy, and Chickasaw are all relatively thin-shelled when compared to hickory nut relatives. All recognized varieties of pecan are grafted to seedling-produced rootstock. Many years ago it was common practice in the nursery trade to graft pecan shoots to hickory root systems.

Pecans have very usual pollination habits. Poor pollination will cause faulty nuts (e.g. "the meat is shriveled and dried-up." Good pecan production depends upon the selection of the best variety for your area. To choose the best variety consider the following factors:

1. Cross pollination between varieties usually results in more nuts per cluster.
2. Maturity of male (tassels) and female (future nuts) flowers on the same tree do not normally coincide at bloom time. If self-pollination does occur, the nut meat will be usually be undersize and of poor quality.
3. Disease and insect resistance is critically important if a spray program is not planned.

4. Proper variety selection, spacing, and arrangement is essential for a productive pecan orchard.

Most nurseryman can help you choose two or more varieties that will grow and pollinate well in your particular area.

Most pecan varieties will not bear nuts until eight to 10 years after planting. During this time it is critical that the tree be pruned and fertilized to establish a strong architecture on the tree for future nut crops.

For the newly planted nonbearing tree apply one pound of 10-10-10 fertilizer per tree just prior to bud swell in early March the first year. Apply two pounds of 10-10-10 per tree the following year. The third and succeeding years, apply four pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer for each inch of trunk diameter. (Measure the trunk one foot from the soil).

Fertilize in bands 12 to 15 inches apart, starting at the drip line of the branches and moving toward the trunk.

DO NOT put fertilizer in the tree hole at planting or closer than 1 foot from the trunk.

Fertilizer improperly applied or applied too close to the trunk can stunt or kill a healthy young pecan tree.

Soil pH in the root zone of the tree should be maintained at a pH

6.0 to 6.5 for maximum nutrient utilization. Soil test around your trees every two to three years.

Nut-bearing trees require a different fertilizer regime. Apply a complete fertilizer in February or four weeks prior to bud swell. Use four pounds of 10-10-10 per inch of trunk diameter.

Take the trunk diameter measurement just below the first scaffold branch. For example, a 20-inch-diameter trunk needs four pounds per inch multiplied by 20 inches or 80 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer per tree. Minor elements such as zinc, manganese, or boron may be required but apply these nutrients only as NCDA soil or tissue recommendations specify because overapplication of these nutrients could be fatal to your tree! Never apply substances like lye or other such products unless specifically labeled for that use!

Good publications on pecan culture are few and far between. However, your North Carolina Cooperative Extension agent may have an old copy of "Growing Pecans in North Carolina." This older publication is well written and contains a wealth of good information. If you send me a SASE, I will gladly send you a copy.

Send your gardening questions and comments to the Plant Doctor, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia, NC 28422.

Friends Move Sweetheart Ball

The Friends of the Library Sweetheart Ball will be held at the Shallotte National Guard Armory instead of the Senior Citizens' Center as originally planned.

The dance, scheduled for Friday, Feb. 11, is a fundraiser to help the Friends organization operate a temporary library while the West Brunswick Branch is being renovated and expanded this spring and summer.

The dance will take place from 7-10 p.m. Tickets are \$5 for singles and \$8 for couples.

Performing will be Nik's Orchette of Wilmington with a variety of musical styles.

Talent Competition March 12

The 1994 Tri-County Talent Competition will be held Saturday, March 12, at Kenan Auditorium on the campus of UNC-Wilmington.

Categories include vocal, dance, dramatic and instrumental presentations. Contestants will compete within their own age division and category, and competition is open to solos, duets and trios of all ages.

Trophies will be awarded to the first, second and third place winners in each age division and category, with a medal going to all other places. All contestants will compete for the overall awards.

Proceeds will benefit the Hearing-Impaired Preschool in Wilmington.

For applications call (910)762-7963 or (910)395-2028.

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'Save Our Sounds' Seeks Entries In Poster Contest

A statewide environmental organization is sponsoring the Save Our Sounds Coastal Celebration Poster Contest.

"Save Our Sounds aims to educate our state's children about the importance of conserving North Carolina's valuable waters," said spokesman Barbara Mannen. "This contest allows them to think about their environment as well as express their artistic talent."

Entries will be accepted until March 12, and grades 3-8 are eligi-

ble to participate. Winning posters will be shown on a Raleigh television station and displayed at the Save Our Sounds Coastal Celebration April 16-17 at the Kerr Scott Building on the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh.

A winner will be accepted from each grade, and prizes such as coupons for meals, games and toys will be awarded.

Entries may be mailed to Save Our Sounds Poster contest, Box 12000, Raleigh NC 27605.

Updated Food Labels Offer Improved Nutritional Data

Shoppers reading the labels of packaged foods recently may have noticed something different—the new nutrition facts information on the label.

The new labels can help consumers make better choices for a healthful diet, according to Mary L. Russ, home economics extension agent with the Brunswick County Cooperative Extension Service.

They also help increase buyers' confidence because claims like "low cholesterol" and "fat free" can be used only if a food meets new legal standards set by the government.

To help consumers better understand how to use the new labels, Russ will present a program on "New Food Labels—How Can They Help?" Friday, March 18, at 10 a.m. at the Calabash Fire Station.

Sponsored by the Calabash Ex-

tension Homemakers Club, the program is open to anyone interested in learning more about the new labeling.

For more information contact the extension office at 253-4425. The office is in the Agriculture Building at the Brunswick County Government Center in Bolivia.

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