

Acid Soil May Be Fig Tree's Problem If The Fruit Quality Is Suffering

Dear Plant Doctor: The past three years I have contacted you by phone in reference to my fig tree. The fruit is hard and no good to eat. Each time you send me information on fig culture. I still have a problem as you can see by the figs enclosed.

I transferred my fig trees from Fayetteville to Brunswick County four years ago. Prior to moving these trees, they produced good fruit. What can I do to help these trees produce good fruit?—Supply

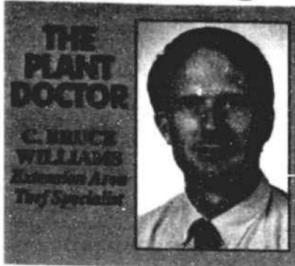
ANSWER: Thank you for your letter. The reason I continue to send you letters on fig culture is I believe you have a soil problem that is influencing your fruit quality. It is most likely a root pruning parasite, a nutrient toxicity, or a nutrient deficiency is causing your fruit to be so hard. No fungal disease is evident on the fruit.

Figs do best in a soil that has a pH between 6.0 and 7.0. Figs can tolerate more alkaline soils easier than acid soils. I often see extremely acid soils in your neck of the woods. If the soil pH is too acid, then some plant nutrients may be unavailable while others may be toxic to your fig plant. Take a soil sample and submit for analysis (at your county Cooperative Extension Office) to determine the pH and inherent fertility of your soil.

Severe nematode infestations can also influence your fruit quality. Nematodes love to feed on fig roots. High populations of plant parasitic nematodes can seriously harm the ability of your plant to extract water and nutrients from the soil. Use a compost rich in shrimp shells, fish scales, poultry feathers or other high-chitin-containing material to reduce nematode populations.

Figs are heavy feeders. For best results, apply one pound of an 8-8-8 fertilizer for each year of age until a maximum of 12 pounds of fertilizer per plant is reached; then maintain this rate each year. If the age of your tree is unknown, apply 1 pound of fertilizer per year for each foot of height. Apply the fertilizer as follows: heavy soils (clays or silts), when buds swell; sandy soils, half when buds swell and the other half in late May. Place fertilizer over mulch in a circle starting from the ends of the branches and working toward the trunk in a one-foot band. If the fig plant produces more than 1 to 2 feet of new stem growth per year, reduce or eliminate nitrogen fertilization. Excessive nitrogen results in light fruiting, fruit splitting and souring.

Dear Plant Doctor: The leaves on my dogwood are turning brown from the tip inward (sample enclosed). I just planted these trees



THE PLANT DOCTOR
C. BRUCE WILLIAMS
Extension Area Tree Specialist

ANSWER: You have a classic case of leaf scorch. Recently planted trees do not have an extensive root system. The roots are all concentrated in the pot or a root ball. During hot, dry weather (like the spring we just had) the newly planted tree does not have a root system sufficient enough to forage for all the water needed for plant growth. The plant will lose water through the leaves faster than the root system can supply water.

You must water the plant until an adequate root system can be developed. Recently planted dogwoods and Japanese maples are especially

susceptible to leaf scorch during hot, dry weather.

Dear Plant Doctor: I have beautiful crape myrtles this year but the leaves are getting a disease and I am afraid the plant will die. Some leaves get a gray-white mold on them while other leaves get large brown spots and then fall off. Is there a spray I can use to get rid of this disease?—Wilmington

ANSWER: Your problem is due to powdery mildew (*Erysiphe lagerstroemiae*). Crape myrtles (*Lagerstroemia indica*) are prone to powdery mildew problems, but the disease is easily controlled with appli-

cations of the fungicides Banner (propiconazole) or Bayleton (triadimefon). Follow all label directions. Many new crape myrtle cultivars have varying levels of genetic resistance to powdery mildew, so be sure to plant new varieties with resistance to the disease to reduce future pesticide applications.

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