



# TREE TOPICS

A Newsletter From Your Friends At Arborilogical™ Services, Inc.

Vol. 15 • Issue 1    DALLAS 972-442-1524 • FT. WORTH 817-849-1160 • TOLL FREE • 866-55 ARBOR • www.arborilogical.com    SPRING 2010

## ANSWERS FROM YOUR ARBORISTS

### MY NEIGHBORS ARE PRUNING THEIR CREPE MYRTLES. IS IT TIME TO PRUNE THEM?

by Ben Thomas – I.S.A. Certified Arborist

As the leaves drop, and the dormant season begins, it is the optimal time to prune Crepe Myrtles. Many varieties of Crepe Myrtles planted in our local landscapes become small trees, growing to a mature height exceeding 15 feet. When it comes to pruning these trees, do so for the same reasons you prune other species of trees. Remove deadwood or the occasional broken limb, remove crossing limbs that create wounds, raise the canopy for sidewalk or driveway clearance, or improving roof and building clearance.

Frequently, Crepe Myrtles are improperly pruned in a method referred to as topping. Many avid tree lovers call the method Crepe Murder. Topping is the removal of all limbs to the previous year's pruning scars. The scars are sometimes called knuckles. It is not clear when or where this pruning practice began, but knuckling is both harmful and ugly. Knucklers claim topping helps produce more blooms the following summer. However, research has debunked that statement. What it does

cause is rapid unhealthy growth that is more susceptible to insect attack, and branching which is structurally inferior.

The seedpods that remain on the plant after the leaves drop are occasionally an aesthetic thorn in the side of some Crepe Myrtle owners. These may be removed, but it is not necessary. These pods will drop from the plant as the new spring growth emerges.

Like other trees, Crepe Myrtles may be pruned at anytime of the year if need be. However, remember that they bloom on current year's growth, and removal of current year's growth will likely reduce the volume of flowers. For more information on pruning Crepe Myrtles, look over the following resources or call Arborilogical™ Service at 866-55-ARBOR or 866 552-7267.

*Pruning Mature Trees:*

[http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/pruning\\_mature.aspx](http://www.treesaregood.com/treecare/pruning_mature.aspx)

*Crepe Myrtle Pruning, by Steve Houser:*

[http://arborilogical.com/articles/crepe\\_myrtle\\_pruning.htm](http://arborilogical.com/articles/crepe_myrtle_pruning.htm)

### WHY ARE THE STEMS AND LEAVES ON MY CREPE MYRTLES TURNING BLACK?

by Chris Brewer – I.S.A. Certified Arborist

Aphids and azalea bark scale feed on the sugars produced by Crepe Myrtles. The insects' digestive systems do not process all of the material they eat. The undigested sugars pass through the insects and are deposited on the leaf or stem where the insects are feeding. This excretion is called honeydew. Honeydew has a high sugar content and is sticky to the touch.

Honeydew is a perfect medium for the growth of black sooty mold. This black mold is what you are seeing on the twigs and limbs of Crepe Myrtles. To eliminate the black sooty mold, it is necessary to stop the production of honey-

dew. To eliminate the honeydew it is necessary to manage the insects producing it.

Azalea bark scale can be managed with appropriately timed applications of horticultural oil. We are also experiencing great results managing aphids, azalea bark scale, and thus sooty mold, with the systemic insecticide, Merit®. A single soil injection application between late winter and early spring provides a year's management. The Crepe Myrtles also benefit from the soil injection process, which includes fertilization and soil aeration. Your arborist can design a management program that best meets your needs.

### DO MY TREES HAVE HERBICIDE DAMAGE?

by Kevin Bassett – I.S.A. Certified Arborist

The use of herbicides and other lawn care chemicals around trees can be very damaging. Before using any chemical in your landscape or near your trees, READ THE LABEL. Many herbicides are made specifically for turf, and are not designed or intended to be used near trees. These chemicals will have information on the label specifying the materials cannot be applied near trees.

There are a number of very important considerations that need addressing before applying herbicides. What is "close to a tree"?



Considering tree root systems cover huge areas and volumes of soil, the use of some herbicides should not be allowed anywhere on the property. That statement sounds extreme, but arbor-

*continued on page 4*

## YOUR LEADERS AT

### ARBORIOLOGICAL™ SERVICES

DALLAS: 972-442-1524 • FT. WORTH: 817-849-1160

TOLL FREE: 866-55 ARBOR • FAX: 972-429-0012

- Steve Houser** —  
President/Owner, I.S.A. Certified Arborist  
shouser@arboriological.com
- Steve Barrett** —  
Executive Vice President/General Manager  
sbarrett@arboriological.com
- Lisa Pennington** —  
Office Manager  
lpennington@arboriological.com
- Onecimo Carlos** —  
Production Manager  
ocarlos@arboriological.com
- RuthAnn Jackson** —  
Scheduling Manager  
rjackson@arboriological.com
- Kevin Bassett** —  
Vice President, I.S.A. Certified Arborist;  
Plant Pathology,  
B.S. Colorado State Univ.,  
kbassett@arboriological.com
- Sarah Brackin** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist; Forestry,  
B.S. Mississippi State Univ.  
sbrackin@arboriological.com
- Chris Brewer** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist,  
cbrewer@arboriological.com
- Diamond Compton** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist; Forestry,  
B.S. Stephen F. Austin Univ.  
dcompton@arboriological.com
- Laura McLarry** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist; Horticulture,  
B.S. Texas Tech Univ.  
lmclarry@arboriological.com
- Russell Peters** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist; Plant Pathology,  
M.S. Texas A&M Univ., B.S. Texas Tech Univ.  
rpeters@arboriological.com
- Bill Seaman** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist; Horticulture,  
B.S. Texas Tech Univ.  
bseaman@arboriological.com
- Ben Thomas** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist; Urban Forestry,  
B.S. Iowa State Univ.  
bthomas@arboriological.com
- Bryan White** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist; Forestry,  
B.S. Stephen F. Austin Univ.  
bwhite@arboriological.com
- Nicolas Martinez** —  
Assistant Production Manager
- Leobardo Blancas** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist
- Leoncio Carlos** —  
I.S.A. Certified Arborist,  
Production Crew Foreman
- Martin Carlos** —  
Production Crew Foreman
- Jose Navarro** —  
Production Crew Foreman
- Miguel Pastenes** —  
Production Crew Foreman
- David Ruiz** —  
Production Crew Foreman
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Production Crew Foreman
- Keith Moody** —  
Chief Mechanic



## HOW DO I WATER MY LANDSCAPE CORRECTLY?

by Sarah Brackin – I.S.A. Certified Arborist

It would be wonderful if there were a simplistic answer to this question. The most uncomplicated answer is to water deeply and infrequently averaging 1 inch of water a week during the growing season. This watering method allows for more oxygen in the soil, deep and healthy root systems, fewer occurrences of diseases, and lower water bills and responsible use of water.

To accomplish deep and infrequent watering, use one or both of these methods:

- Dig a small hole and feel the soil. If it is moist within the first 4 inches of soil depth, watering is not needed.
- Calibrate your irrigation system to determine how long and often you need to water. To calibrate your sprinklers, you will need to follow two steps.

• **Step 1.** Measure how much water is emitted from your sprinkler system in 30 minutes. Pick a day when the soil has been dry for several days. Scatter three or four shallow cans (such as tuna cans) through one sprinkler zone. Make sure the cans are identical. The more cans you place the more accurate the measurement will be. Turn on that sprinkler zone and allow it to run for 30 minutes. Once you turn off the system, collect the cans, and pour all of the water into one of the cans. With a ruler, measure how many inches of water are in the can. Divide the total inches of water by the number of collection cans. This will tell you the average amount of water applied to your landscape during the previous 30 minutes.

*EX: Four cans were placed in a zone and the sprinklers ran for 30 minutes. The water was poured into one can and the water measured 2 inches. Two inches of water divided by 4 cans equals ½ inch of water in 30 minutes. (2" water/4 cans = .5") This means you could water twice a week for 30 minutes each time to accomplish the 1" of water a week rule.*

• **Step 2.** Use a small shovel or hand trowel to dig a hole or part the soil for gauging how deep the water penetrated into the soil during the 30 minutes. The goal is to wet the top 6 inches of the soil, but running off into the sidewalk and street, you may need to water in two

cycles to acquire the right depth of moisture. If water is beginning to run off after 15 minutes, do not run the zone for more than 15 minutes at a time. Allow at least 30 minutes to an hour for the soil to dry. Then run the zone again for the last 15 minutes interval to allow the soil to absorb the water to the desired depth of 6 inches. Follow these same steps for each zone.

When the soil begins to dry and indicator plants, such as grass, begin to lie down and look less green, check the soil for moisture. If it has dried within the first 4 to 6 inches, it is time to water again.

Most plants will grow well with one or two waterings a week, adding up to 1 inch of water during the growing season. Always compensate for any rainfall in your watering schedule. If you have high-water demanding plants such as hydrangeas or impatiens that are drying out more quickly than the rest of your plants, consider handwatering them, or removing them and planting a more drought tolerant plant. Over time, the excessive watering of a 60 year-old Red Oak to keep a flat of flowers alive will result in losing the tree.

Here are some helpful websites for drought tolerant plants:

Recommended trees:

[http://www.arboriological.com/articles/recommended\\_tree\\_species.htm](http://www.arboriological.com/articles/recommended_tree_species.htm)

Texas Superstars:

[www.texassuperstar.com](http://www.texassuperstar.com)

Outstanding Shrubs for Texas:

<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/extension/xeriscape/table4.html>

Recommended Plant Material for North Central Texas:

<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/plantanswers/publications/northcen.html>

Texas Native Tree Database:

<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/orname ntals/natives>

Texas Native Plant List:

<http://www.txnativeplants.org/>

Outstanding Landscape Plants:

<http://aggiehorticulture.tamu.edu/extension/xeriscape/xeritable.html>

Texas Smartscapes:

<http://www.txsmartscape.com/>

## TURFGRASS, TREES, AND GROUND COVER ALTERNATIVES

### CAN YOU PRUNE MY TREES SO THE GRASS WILL GROW?

by Laura McLarry – I.S.A. Certified Arborist

The answer depends upon the tree species, canopy density, and type of existing turfgrass. The three predominant turfgrasses in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex are—in order of most shade tolerant: St. Augustine, Zoysia, and Bermuda. If your landscape has Bermuda grass in a shady location, pruning your trees is not a satisfactory, long-term solution. Consider replacing the thinning sod with a more shade tolerant turfgrass like St. Augustine grass and lightly pruning your trees.

To allow more sunlight to your turf, we can lightly thin the tree canopies and raise canopy heights. However, trees should always have a 1/3 trunk to 2/3 canopy ratio. Raising tree canopy height past the 1/3 rule can be detrimental to tree health and structural integrity.

Live Oaks are the most common culprit of turfgrass decline due to their dense, evergreen canopy. Even with periodic canopy thinning, there comes a time when even St. Augustine grass begins to dwindle and fade. So instead of waging war on your trees and turfgrass, consider shade tolerant ground covers.

#### For the Turf Lovers

Mondograss (*Ophiopogon japonicus*) is a great alternative if you want the look of turf. Standard (not the dwarf) Mondograss' mature height is about 8 inches tall. It will spread by runners to provide a solid stand.

Liriope is another wonderful grass alternative and is available in various shades of green, to white and yellow variegated varieties. It ranges in height from 1-3 feet and is clump-forming.

Carex species, for the naturalist, deserve consideration. Many of these sedges perform beautifully in lower light and water conditions and provide interesting blue, green, and even bronze colors.

#### For a Broadleaf Look

Purple Wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei* 'Coloratus') is a favorite drought and shade tolerant plant. It grows 1 foot tall

## STRUCTURAL PRUNING OF YOUNG TREES

by Chris Brewer – I.S.A. Certified Arborist

Young trees need pruning with an eye to the future. Pruning with this goal in mind is called structural pruning. Removal of crossed or poorly attached limbs is best accomplished when trees are young and resilient. Limbs that will come into conflict with buildings, play equipment, and power lines, can be pruned in a skillful manner that will reduce or eliminate future conflict.

Structural pruning of young trees is an opportune time to remove all but one of the limbs competing to become the dominant stem, or leader for the tree. A single central-stemmed tree is stronger and more desirable than a tree with multiple leaders. Consult a Certified Arborist before attempting to structural prune your valuable trees. Improper pruning can permanently damage one of nature's finest works.

and eventually spreads 2-3 feet wide. In autumn, the evergreen leaves turn a lovely plum color in light shade conditions, though it will tolerate heavy shade.

Asian Jasmine (*Trachaelospermum jasminoides*), the most commonly planted groundcover in the Dallas area, grows in full sun to light shade conditions and is, for the most part, evergreen. There are white, yellow, and orange variegated forms of Asian Jasmine, which can be slower growing.

An old favorite, Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*), also thrives in shade to light morning sun. It is evergreen and has light-blue blossoms in early spring. Periwinkle grows from 4-14 inches tall, depending upon the variety.

The traditional Metroplex shade groundcover is English Ivy (*Hedera helix*). English Ivy tolerates dense shade well. Several of the indoor potted plant varieties can also survive out-of-doors when winter temperatures are mild. English Ivy will climb your trees, so care must be taken to keep this vine one foot from the base of trees. As with all groundcovers, never allow plant material to cover the base (flare) of your trees.

Other groundcovers to consider include ferns, moneywort, horseherb, and artemesia. Call a truce to the turfgrass war and consider the many wonderful groundcover alternatives.

## WILL MISTLETOE KILL MY TREES?

by Kevin Bassett – I.S.A. Certified Arborist

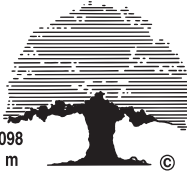
Normally, the simple answer to this question is no. In and of itself, infection of a tree by mistletoe does not kill the host tree. However, mistletoe is a parasitic plant that steals water and minerals from a tree and derives its nutrition at the expense of the tree. When combined with other significant stresses, such as drought or construction injury, death can occur and mistletoe will have played a part in the tree's demise.

The winter months are the most efficient months to remove mistletoe from deciduous trees, since with leaf drop, infection sites—particularly new locations are easiest to see. In heavily infested trees, complete eradication of mistletoe is next to impossible; however, control can be achieved with judicious pruning. The level of infestation can be managed to the benefit of the tree. The sooner the small young mistletoe plants are pruned away, the less chance further infection sites will develop. When you see the small white berries (seeds) on the mistletoe plant, you are about to see a dramatic increase in the number of infection sites throughout the tree. More infection sites will mean more of the tree's water is being stolen, resulting in a greater loss of vigor. This opens the door for another stress agent to do even greater damage and accelerate the decline of tree health.

For more information on mistletoe, visit the Pathologist's Corner on our website at <http://arborilogical.com/articles/pathologist.htm>.

# Arborilogical<sup>TM</sup> Services, Inc.

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## CAN ARBORIOLOGICAL<sup>TM</sup> SERVICES STILL HELP CARE FOR MY TREES WITH THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE?

by Bryan White – I.S.A. Certified Arborist

Mention the word economy and fear may likely be the emotional response triggered. You may wonder how that pertains to caring for your trees. Many of us find ways to adjust our budgets to make our dollars stretch farther. Being a service-driven business, we understand this acutely. Therefore, we offer a service that assists your management of the costs associated with caring for your trees. We refer to this service as an inspection program. From a financial aspect, the best part of an inspection program is that it is offered as a free service to our clients who want to develop a long-term relationship with our company.

Our inspection program is a service that is beyond the client's usual expectations. We take tree care beyond pruning, removing, and fertilizing. The program allows us to inspect your trees on a continuing basis and meet with you to create a tree care management plan.

Arborilogical Services' arborists are degreed professionals who have the unique desire to care for your trees and view them from the perspective of your personal long-range goals and desires. The recommendations your arborist will

propose focus on meeting present needs, but also with the future in mind. This management process does not happen overnight. It develops through a relationship established over time and is not achieved through a single visit. An inspection program approach to tree care planning helps you manage and

budget related costs. An aspect of long-range planning includes prioritizing tree care.

If this service may add value to your tree care needs, please contact us at 972-442-1524 or [http://arborilogical.com/service\\_request.htm](http://arborilogical.com/service_request.htm).

### HERBICIDE DAMAGE? *continued from page 1*

ists know that many textbooks depict tree root systems as ending at the limits of the canopy, or what is often referred to as the drip line. In practice, a tree's root system will grow in soils covering a much greater area than the drip line. Research shows that the total root area of a tree may be as much as 4-7 times the area under the canopy.

Tree roots are opportunistic; they grow where they find what they need. They seek loose, well-aerated soil, and moisture.

Broadleaf herbicides are formulated to kill broadleaf weeds. Trees are broad-leaf plants. So, using a herbicide may rid your dandelion problem, but it may also be picked up by the root system of the old Oak tree and cause serious problems.

Symptoms of herbicide injury include leaf curling or cupping, browning of the tissue between the leaf veins, leaf shedding, and branch and limb dieback. It is possible herbicides for use on turfgrass can kill your trees. So be very careful when using these products and realize the turf and tree roots may be sharing the same soil. As mentioned before, when using home and garden chemicals, always READ THE LABEL. If you have any questions concerning the product, get them answered by an expert or call the manufacturer before using the material. If you suspect that your trees may have been affected by an application of herbicide, call your Certified Arborist. In some cases, we can help the tree get past the initial injury.