Ask Alicia: Your Gardening Questions Answered

The warm weather has welcomed gardeners back out into their yards once again! (And the questions coming into our office have been non-stop.) If you have a question or problem in your garden, don’t be afraid to ask. We are here to help!

Q: I heard that putting moth balls in my vegetable garden will keep critters and insects out. Is this a good idea and will the produce be safe to eat?

A: Mothballs contain the chemical dichlorobenzene and are not labeled for use on food products. Mothballs are often suggested for repelling wildlife from gardens, but this is an illegal pesticide use and probably ineffective. Another thing to consider is that the mothballs themselves present an attractive nuisance to both children and pets. If eaten they are highly toxic and therefore should not be used for this purpose.

Q: I would like to grow peaches and apples. Can you recommend varieties that grow well here in Baker County?

A: Many fruit trees require a certain number of chill hours to bloom and produce fruit. In Baker County, we receive 540-660 chill hours each year, and in general, you should choose fruit trees that require chill hours slightly below or in that range. Some recommended varieties of peaches include: Floridaking (400 chill hrs), Flordacrest (350 chill hrs) and Gulfprince (400 chill hrs). Recommended apples include: Anna and Golden Dorset. You will need two apple trees for cross-pollination, and locals with apple-growing experience recommend growing two Anna or two Golden Dorset, not one of each since bloom time can be slightly different (a week or two difference can result in poor or no pollination at all). For a full list of recommended fruit varieties for Baker County, visit our website.

Q: I’m preparing my vegetable garden for spring planting. How much organic matter should I use and when should I use it?

A: In general, it is recommended that you spread 25-100 pounds of organic compost or composted animal manure per 100 square feet of garden. Composted organics may be applied at planting time. Un-composted manures should be worked into the soil 90-120 days before planting; 90 days if manure does not touch edible plant portions and 120 days if manure does touch edible plant portions.

For Extension Programs offered around the state, see the IFAS Extension Web Calendar at http://calendar.ifas.ufl.edu/calendar/index.htm.
**Fruit Tree Calendar: March**

The following fruit trees require attention this month. All fertilizer recommendations are for optimum growth of fruit trees. It is important to remember that you always have the option of applying less fertilizer, but the amount of fertilizer should not exceed these recommendations.

**Figs:** Fertilization may begin this month, although fig trees typically require light fertilization. Excess fertilization can promote excessive vegetative growth and low yield. If the total amount of vegetative growth is less than one foot in length, then it is appropriate to apply fertilizer. For young trees, 1/2 pound of 10-10-10 with micronutrients can be applied three to five times during the growing season, starting in March and ending by August 1st. For large trees, apply 2-4 pounds of 10-10-10 with micronutrients three to five times during the growing season (March to August).

**Mulberries:** Fruit begins to mature this month; other than harvesting fruit mulberries require almost no care.

**Muscadine Grapes (Year 2):** Fertilize late this month using 1 pound of 8-8-8 or 10-10-10; apply the fertilizer in bands about 1 foot to either side of the vine. *Note: It is sometimes beneficial to apply fertilizer that has micronutrients added.*

**Muscadine Grapes (Year 3+):** Fertilize late this month using up to 3 pounds of 8-8-8 or 10-10-10; apply the fertilizer in bands about 1 foot to either side of the vine. *Note: It is sometimes beneficial to apply fertilizer that has micronutrients added.*

**Pecans (Newly Planted):** A soil fertility test should be conducted prior to planting and no fertilizer should be placed in the planting hole during installation. *Year 1:* Fertilize early this month using 10-10-10 with micronutrients, 1 pound per tree. *Year 2:* Fertilizer late this month using 10-10-10 with micronutrients, 2 pounds per tree. *Note: Fertilizer should contain Zinc (Zn) to prevent nutrient deficiencies. Do not apply fertilizer in a clump around the base of the tree, instead spread out the fertilizer in a circle with a 3- to 5-foot diameter around the trunk of the tree. Avoid putting any fertilizer directly against the trunk.*

**Persimmons:** Apply first of three applications of fertilizer; fertilize using 1/2 to 1 pound of 10-10-10 with micronutrients per year of age. All three applications should not exceed 10-15 pounds per year.

**Pomegranate:** Fertilize this month using 8-8-8 or similar; young trees need 2.0 to 2.5 pounds per tree and mature trees need 4.5 to 6.5 pounds. *Note: Excessive or late applications of fertilizer tend to delay fruit maturity and reduce color and quality.*

To access our Month to Month Calendar: Fruits and Nuts, visit our website and look under ‘Gardening Information’.

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**Water Less**

Daylight Savings Time starts on the 2nd Sunday in March. This means our watering schedule may change also…

- Water only as needed and not between 10am and 4pm.
- Water no more than twice per week, no more than 1/2 to 3/4 inches of water, for no more than one hour per zone.
- Restrictions apply to private wells and pumps, and water from public and private utilities.
- Some exceptions apply.  

Learn more at floridaswater.com