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Texas Master Gardeners



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This time of year, all of the nurseries and big box stores are crowded with colorful crotons (*Codiaeum variegatum*). Due to their hues of red, orange and yellow, they make a great fall display along with pumpkins and gourds. However, what many non-gardeners don't know is that crotons are only good in zones 11-12, meaning they do not take our winters very well. They are actually a tropical plant that loves heat, humidity, dappled sunlight, and plenty of water. So, if you are like me and want a little fall color for your porch, here are some things to know to keep them successfully alive until next spring.

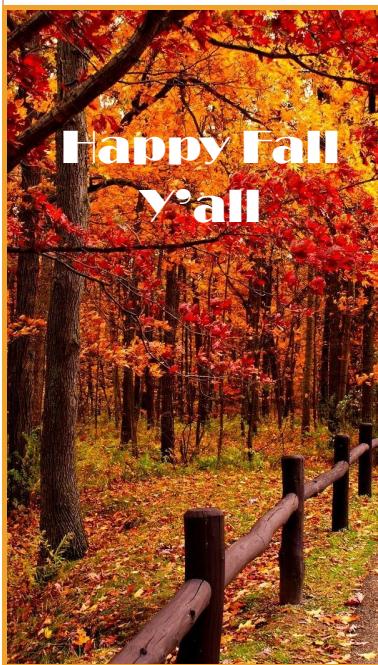
Move Indoors Once the Temperatures Hit 50° F : Being a tropical plant, crotons need steady heat and humidity – pretty much lacking in our winters. Any cold weather will make the leaves drop off, and if it gets down to freezing, the plant will not survive. Keep your croton alive by moving it indoors during the colder months which will not only protect it from the cold but also from high winds and other potentially damaging environmental factors. If you have a greenhouse, then your chances of preserving crotons are even better.

Care and Maintenance: Crotons need bright, indirect light. They do not like unfiltered, direct sunlight, but thrive in dappled sunlight. Their vibrant colors depend on bright light. Low humidity inside the house makes crotons particularly susceptible to spider mites. The best way to get rid of the pests is to apply a miticide and mist them daily. Try to keep the humidity level in your home at 40% to 80%, but if that isn't feasible, then you might try a humidity tray. Low humidity will cause leaf drop. Reduce watering in the winter to biweekly. Use a fertilizer sparingly during the winter, increasing it during the summer to a slow-release fertilizer pellet such as a 3-1-2.

Winter Forecast 2020-2021

This year both NOAA and The Farmers' Almanac agree that a 50% - 55% chance of a La Niña winter is ahead. This means Texas will have milder winter temperatures with less precipitation. We are already experiencing milder autumn weather than last year at the same time.

In a typical La Niña year, the jet stream tends to have a more northern positioning, which can mean consistent cold storms in the north and northeast.



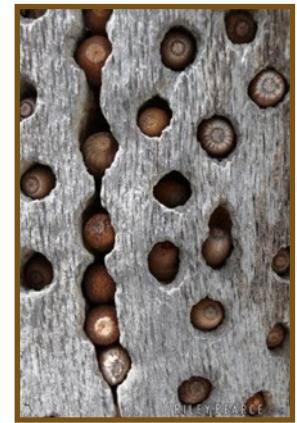
What is a Snag?



What is a snag? No, it's not a pulled thread in a sweater. It's a dead tree in the forest. Tree "snag" is a term used in forestry and forest ecology, which refers to a standing dead or dying tree. If the tree has fallen over, then it's simply called a log or logs. If you live in a controlled neighborhood, more than likely, leaving a snag alone will not be allowed. And to most gardeners, the sooner a dead tree comes down, the better as they can be unsightly and unsafe. However, if you have enough land and are so inclined, then think twice before you cut down that dead tree.

Benefits of a Snag: When a tree dies, it still has not completely satisfied its ecological potential. Even in death, a dying tree continues to play multiple roles for the surrounding ecology. Snags are the main source of nesting sites for birds and other animals such as bats, squirrels, raccoons, and opossums. It is also a place to hide from predators and shelter in bad weather. Many bird species use the branches and tops of snags for perching and viewing of rivals and spotting potential food. Rotting tree decay with fungi, mosses, microscopic organisms, and insects provide nesting material and a good food source for wild birds and other animals. Some birds use the decayed trunks to store nuts for winter.

Evolution of a Snag: Sometimes, a tree will die due to a massive insect invasion or from a disease which is called a biotic cause. At other times, multiple factors might trigger the start of death for a tree such as flooding, drought, excessive heat or extreme low temperatures. This is called abiotic causes. Or maybe the tree has reached the end of its life span and simply declines through the years until it's no longer a living organism. Whatever the cause, the eventual death of the tree will stop leaf formation and cause the limbs to drop off when dry and brittle. Even the decaying tree logs will create a habitat on the forest floor for other creatures or even as "nurse logs" for seedlings to embed in and start new tree growth.



- **When should I remove a snag?** Never allow dead wood to rest against your home. Also any trees that may fall on your home (or a neighbor's home) should be removed. In both these cases, however, consider moving the wood to another safer area of your yard.
- **What about termites?** As long as the snags are a reasonable distance from your home, termites and other pests won't find their way into your home.



- **How do I create artificial snags?** If there are no natural snags in your yard, you can create artificial ones by trimming branches on live trees of varying sizes and types. Hardwood trees tend to make better nesting habitats while softer wood is better for food foraging. If you do not wish to create snags from living trees, the use of **nesting boxes** can be a good alternative.
 - **How many snags should I have?** Three snags per acre is a good estimate for most areas, but you should check with your local wildlife management authority to get specific recommendations for your region.

If you have the land and don't mind the unsightly look of a snag, please think twice before felling a dead tree. Your wildlife neighbors will be so happy that you didn't.

Oh Deer!



We have owned our property in rural Grimes County for sixteen years. In that time, we have never had a problem with the deer eating our gardens – vegetable or ornamental. I used to brag to anyone who would listen that our deer were well behaved and left us alone. That is, until this year. I think it all started when a doe decided to give birth in our front yard. While we were thrilled that the mother trusted us enough to leave her fawn in the yard while she was out foraging, that thrill soon changed to horror when we discovered many of our ornamentals were chewed up. My prolific dinner plate hibiscus was the first to go. I found it completely gnawed to the ground. I soon started seeing other plants snipped and blooms missing. Who would have thought deer love thorny roses, but they do! So, my bragging rights are now gone, and I'm struggling like everyone else to find a solution to the garden eating population.

According to some experts, there are four sure-fire tactics to keep deer out of your garden:

Tactic #1: Choose deer-resistant plants. Sounds easy enough, but you may have to experiment until you find the right ones for your area. While my deer love roses and hibiscus, they don't seem to like a lot of native plants such as lantana, plumbago, yellow bells, Turk's cap, salvia, etc. Even though deer will nibble on a rose bush with thorns, they do not like fuzzy or prickly foliage. Deer also don't like heavily fragranced plants such as lantana, sage, thyme, oregano, bee balm, and dill. Leathery foliage seems to repel deer as well because it is hard to digest.

Tactic #2: Install the right kind of deer fence. Deer don't like to jump into unknown areas, so if you install a stockade fence instead of a see-thru fence, then they will be wary. Also, doubling up a fence works in the same way. Deer don't like to jump into an area where they will feel trapped. You can also try what the zoos use by creating a six-to eight-foot rocky border. Deer don't like to walk on unstable rocks. You can go electric, but some folks have said this has failed them.



Tactic #3: Using deer repellents – regularly. There are several products on the market that can be used. There are also several recipes for home made repellent that include many products found in your home. The trick is that they have to be used **religiously** in order to be effective. Try spraying only the plants that the deer are attracted to every seven (7) days. Spray the leaves and the ground surrounding the plant. You will notice most of these products have a strong odor, which is why the deer are hesitant to eat the plant. Some repellents stick to the leaves better than others, so do some research before buying. Just remember the key is to keep the smell up by spraying frequently.

Tactic #4: Scare them. While grandma's pie pans might have worked for her, they don't work here. The best scare tactic is a motion-activated sprinkler. The range of the sprinkler can be easily adjusted to target an area and is ideal for protecting vegetable gardens. Taller sprinklers work better than short ones.



Fall Lawn Fertilizing



Timing is critical for applying fall fertilizer to lawns. The turfgrass must have stopped shoot and leaf growth prior to application. The exact time of cessation of growth varies significantly depending on your geographic location as well as recent temperature conditions (e.g., cool fronts, early frost, late warm spells).

The best way to pinpoint the time to fertilize is by monitoring your mowing frequency. After a few cool nights (i.e., 50° F or below), warm-season turfgrasses, such as Bermuda, Buffalo and St. Augustine, will slow growth rapidly. Your need to mow will become less frequent. When you don't need to mow for two weeks, the time to fertilize is at hand. Cool-season grasses, such as bluegrass and ryegrass, need fall and winter applications of fertilizer because they actively grow in the winter months. Typically for our region the best fall fertilizer date is around October 15th. In general, fall fertilization of warm-season grasses should occur within a week either side of that date.

Fertilizers used in the fall should be high in nitrogen and potassium and low in phosphorus (or no phosphorus). A 2-1-2 or 1-0-1 ratio of nutrients is preferred. The nitrogen portion of the fertilizer should be a combination of quick- and slow-release forms to encourage age production of carbohydrates. These carbohydrates are then stored in the roots for use in earlier spring greening of the lawn and as an energy source for the turfgrass during winter stress.

The amount of fertilizer to apply is one (1) pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Look on the fertilizer bag for guidance on how much area the bag will cover, turn to a nursery professional for assistance or use the simple steps outlined below:

Step 1: Measure Your Lawn: Multiply the length of your lot by the depth and subtract square footage of your house, garage, driveway and landscape plantings.

Step 2: Choose and Use a Nitrogen Fertilizer. Recommendations propose a 1-0-1 ratio of fertilizer or for fall a 2-1-2 which adds potassium to help increase the lawn's tolerance of cold temperatures.

Step 3: Determine How Much Nitrogen to Apply Annually: The type of lawn grass will dictate how many pounds of nitrogen to apply annually per 1,000 square feet of lawn. Further research will give you the right amount for your type of grass. The amount of nitrogen per year should be split into single applications.

Step 4: Apply Lawn Fertilizer at the Proper Time: For fall, the best time in our area is to apply fertilizer after the grass has stopped growing which is generally when nighttime temperatures are consistently in the 50's.

Step 5: Broadcast the Lawn Fertilizer: Determine how many sections you have in the lawn that you can easily walk a spreader around without stopping. Divide the amount of fertilizer proportionally based on the number and size of sections. Divide each section's fertilizer amount in half, and pour half into the spreader. Cut back the spreader setting to the smallest opening that still lets the fertilizer pellets flow out of the hopper easily but keeps the flow evenly so you don't have uneven application. Try not to overlap the distribution pattern. Water the lawn thoroughly to activate the fertilizer and prevent fertilizer burn on the grass.

Step 6: Soil Testing: Soil testing is invaluable information on how to correct poor turfgrass with the proper amounts of nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus.

Step 7: Hold Off After a Heavy Rainstorm: This may seem counter-intuitive but heavy rain can cause fertilizers to run off into storm sewers, creeks and streams causing "algae bloom" which could kill fish.

Insect of the Month: Lovebugs



The **love bug** (*Plecia nearctica*) is a species of march fly found in parts of Central America and the southeastern United States, especially along the Gulf Coast.

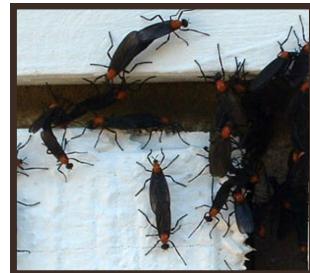
The species was first described in 1940 by D. E. Hardy, but was seen in Louisiana as early as 1911. However, by the end of the 20th century the species had spread heavily to all areas bordering the Gulf of Mexico, as well as Georgia and South Carolina.

Lovebugs' larvae feed on partially decayed vegetation in the landscape and, in this respect, are beneficial to humans. Adults primarily feed on nectar from various plants such as sweet clover and goldenrod. Localized lovebug flights can number in the millions. Male/female pairs (joined tail-to-tail) will hover in the air, drifting slowly. Two major flights occur each year; the **spring flight** occurs during late April and May, and the **summer flight** occurs during late August and September. Flights extend over periods of four to five

weeks. Mating takes place almost immediately after emergence of the females. They have to stick to each other at all times.

This species' reputation as a public nuisance is due not to any bite or sting (it is incapable of either), but to its slightly acidic body chemistry. There are not any health risks to humans, and disease cannot be transmitted through them. Because airborne lovebugs can exist in enormous numbers near highways, they die in large numbers on car windshields, hoods, and radiator grills when the vehicles travel at high speeds. If left for more than an hour or two, the remains become extremely difficult to remove. Their body chemistry has a nearly neutral 6.5 pH but may become acidic at 4.25 pH if left on the car for a day. In the past, the acidity of the dead adult body, especially the female's egg masses, often resulted in pits and etches in automotive paint and chrome if not quickly removed. However, advances in automotive paints and protective coatings have reduced this threat significantly. Now the greatest concern is excessive clogging of vehicle radiator air passages by the bodies of the adults, with a reduction of the cooling effect on engines, and the obstruction of windshields when the

remains of the adults and egg masses are smeared on the glass.



Lovebug adults are attracted to light-colored surfaces, especially if they are freshly painted, but adults congregate almost anywhere, apparently reacting to the effects of sunlight on automobile fumes, asphalt, and other products affected by environmental factors still not completely understood.

Female lovebugs can lay as many as 100-350 eggs and regularly lay these eggs around decaying material on the top layer of ground soil. Lovebug eggs generally hatch after 2-4 days, depending on flight season. Once the eggs have hatched, the larvae start feeding on the decaying material around them, such as decaying plants on the soil and other organic material, and live and remain in the soil until they develop to the pupa stage. During the warmer months the lovebug larvae remain in the larva phase for approximately 120 days and approximately 240 days during the cooler

months. Lovebugs typically stay in the pupa stage about 7-9 days before reaching the adult phase, in which they can start reproducing.

Once adults, lovebugs are ready to start copulating to begin reproducing. Adult male lovebugs emerge first from the pupal stage and hover around until female lovebugs emerge. Mating between lovebugs takes place immediately after emergence of the adult females. A male lovebug copulates and will remain paired up until the female has been fully fertilized. Copulation takes place for 2-3 days before the female detaches, lays her eggs, and dies. Adult females have been recorded to live up to seven days, while adult males may live up to two to five days, but on average lovebugs live three to four days.



Continuing Education

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, no continuing education classes are available except for virtual learning and webinars. Below are on-line classes made available for those members who need additional educational hours. Some virtual classes are being offered on Facebook by Agrilife Water University in partnership with Texas A&M Agrilife Extension. There are also several virtual offerings by Gardening on the Gulf Coast.

October 2020

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5 	6 	7 	8 	9	10
11	12	13 	14 	15	16	17 
18	19	20	21 	22 	23	24
25	26	27	28 	29	30	31

Continuing Education

For registration information on Gardening on the Gulf Coast you will need to register in advance through the link at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/gardening-on-the-gulf-coast-tickets-106812198160>

- Oct 07: Gardening on the Gulf Coast Online Series, “**Gardening with Native Plants**”, 10—11 a.m.
- Oct 14: Gardening on the Gulf Coast Online Series, “**Diversifying Your Tree Canopy**”, 10—11 a.m.
- Oct 21: Gardening on the Gulf Coast Online Series, “**Texas Superstar Plants**”, 10—11 a.m.
- Oct 28: Gardening on the Gulf Coast Online Series: “**Growing Healthy Plants**”, 10—11 a.m.

There are four virtual classes being offered in **Agrilife Water University in partnership with Texas A&M Agrilife Extension**. Please go to: <https://wateruniversity.tamu.edu/events>

- Oct 08: **Grow Native, Not Wild!**, 6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m.
- Oct 17: **Composting**, 9:00 a.m.—11:00 a.m.
- Oct 22: **Family Friendly Gardening**, 6:00 p.m.—8:00 p.m.

Walker County Master Gardeners 2020 On-Line Fall Plant Sale (2 Days starting at 8 a.m.)

October 5th & 6th with pick-up on Saturday, October 10th

Email your interest to: walkercomg@gmail.com

Texas Master Gardeners

203 Veterans Memorial Drive
Navasota, Texas 77868

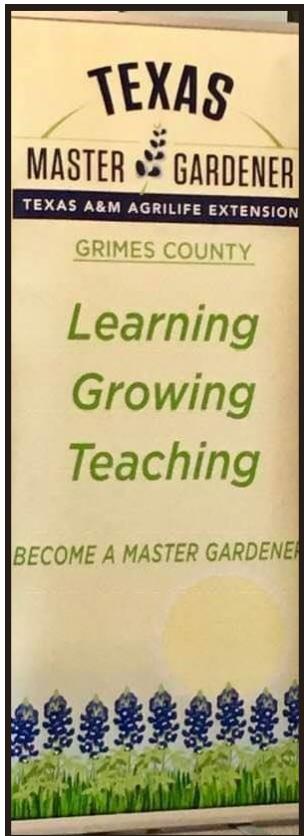


Website: txmng.org/grimes
Facebook: www.facebook.com/GrimesCountyMasterGardeners

Grimes County Master Gardeners



Please send submissions and photos by the
20th of each month to: pwpParmley@gmail.com



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