

Ask an Agent

By: Patricia Porchey

Why is the fruit on my citrus trees so small this year? There's less fruit than usual as well.

It's not uncommon in consecutive years for fruit to vary in size and number. For example a prolific year may be followed by a less-than-average year. Add in stress factors such as drought, flood, and extreme cold and the harvest may decrease even more.

Summer rains may cause the fruit to split, whereas flooding, may actually deprive the roots of oxygen and kill the tree. Our prolonged years of drought are also taking a toll on our citrus. Premature leaf drop, low foliage production and small fruit are indicative of drought. Last winter's cold temperatures increased the number of dead branches and fruit drop for the more vulnerable varieties, especially those caught in the flowering and early fruit set stages.

Fertilizer also influences the health of citrus. Fertilizing is recommended in late February, mid May and early October. Sometimes, all we can do is fertilize and supply adequate moisture in drought periods. Mature trees can usually survive stress better than younger trees unless the tree is significantly older and there is no reversing its decline.

What can I spray on this huge bee hive in my backyard?

With the introduction of Africanized honey bees (AHB) into our county, we no longer suggest homeowners tackle this kind of nest by themselves. Visually, it's not possible to tell if the bees are the gentler European honey bee or the aggressive AHB. The AHB builds nests everywhere and then defends them. If an AHB colony is disturbed, it may send out several hundred bees to defend an area up to 40 yards around the colony.

We recommend you contact one or more bee removal companies for assistance if you see a bee swarm or a nest. Africanized bees can be extremely aggressive if disturbed, resulting in multiple stings. Registered beekeepers do not have AHB in their hives - it is illegal for Florida beekeepers to knowingly keep African honey bees.

I just purchased a new home and there are several Brazilian pepper trees on the property. What's the best way to remove them?

Brazilian pepper tree is one of our non-native invaders. It is one of six invasive plants that are banned from sale and planting in Sarasota County. Its aggressive growth has resulted in many of our native plant communities being displaced. It bears hundreds of bright red berries in the fall and winter which are easily dispersed by birds and mammals. The leaves can be a source of irritation to many people, resulting in a rash.

If trees are cut down to a stump, it's important that the stump be immediately treated within five minutes with an herbicide containing *glyphosate* or *triclopyr*. Apply the herbicide with a sprayer or brush it on to the cambium layer just inside the woody bark. Follow the label directions for concentration rate, protective gear, etc. Foliar sprays can be used on seedlings, but care must be given so spray does not drift to other plants. Consult this website for more information: <http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/405>.

GARDENING

OCTOBER PLANTING GUIDE

Vegetables & herbs: Basil, beets, Borage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrot, cauliflower, celery, chervil, collards, coriander, dill, fennel, garlic, leek, mustard, onions, parsley, peas, rutabaga, sage, spinach, strawberries, Swiss chard, thyme, tomato, and turnips.

Annuals: Ageratum, Alyssum, Begonia, Calendula, Celosia, Coleus, cosmos, dusty miller, foxglove, geranium, Impatiens, Lobelia, marigold, Melampodium, nasturtium, pansy, Pentas, petunia, Salvia, snapdragon, and statice.

Perennials: African iris, aster, blue daze, bush daisy, Chrysanthemum, cigar plant, Coreopsis, Dianthus, Gaillardia, Gerbera daisy, Liatris, Mexican petunia, Salvia, Scabiosa, Shasta daisy, society garlic, and Verbena.

Fruits in Season: Atemoya, avocado, banana, carambola, citrus (calamondin, grapefruit, key lime, lemon, lime, orange, tangelo and tangerine), kumquat, papaya, pecan, persimmon, pomegranate, sea grape, and sugar apple.

Blooming plants: Allamanda, bottlebrush, Bougainvillea, Cassia, Cordia, firecracker plant, firespike, goldenrod, Liatris, lion's ear, oleander, Philippine violet, red and yellow shrimp plants, Salvia, thryallis, Turk's cap, Thunbergia, and yellow elder.

CLASSES

Chinch Bugs & White Grubs, Twin Lakes Park, Nov. 4, 10:00 a.m.

Florida Buggy Critters: The Bad, Good & Harmless, Shamrock Park, Nov. 5, 2:00 p.m.

Attract Wildlife, Gulf Gate Library, Nov. 6, 1:30 p.m.

Organic Vegetable Gardening Orange Blossom Community Garden, 18th & Orange, Nov. 7, 1:00 p.m.

Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles, Fruitville Library, Nov. 16, 2:00 p.m.

Trees & Shrubs in the Landscape, Twin Lakes Park, Nov. 18, 10:00 a.m.

Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Creating your Florida Yard, Twin Lakes Park, Nov. 18, 1:00 p.m.

Protect Yourself from Florida Wildfires, Twin Lakes Park, Nov. 18, 4:00 p.m.

Native Plants for the Landscape, Shamrock Park, Nov. 19, 2:00 p.m.

Organic Vegetable Gardening Laurel Community Garden, Forest & Collins Roads, Laurel, Nov. 21, 10:30 a.m.

Florida Buggy Critters: The Bad, Good & Harmless, Twin Lakes Park, Dec. 2, 10:00 a.m.

Conservation of Native Bee Pollinators, Twin Lakes Park, Dec. 2, 4:00 p.m.

Termites in the Home, Shamrock Park, Dec. 3, 2:00 p.m.

Organic Vegetable Gardening Orange Blossom Community Garden, 18th & Orange, Dec. 5, 1:00 p.m.

To register, call 861-9900.

GETTING HELP

The Master Gardener Help Desk is available to answer your questions. Email: mghelpdesk@scgov.net. It is open Monday-Friday from 9-Noon and 1-4 p.m. Phone: 861-9807. Office: Twin Lakes Park, Clark Road east of I-75.
Satellite help desks: Weekly at four South County libraries and every third Saturday of the month at the Downtown Farmers' Market, Sarasota.
New location: Every fourth Saturday of the month at the **Fruitville Library Reading Garden**, 10-Noon.

(Patricia Porchey is an Urban Horticulture Agent with University of Florida/IFAS Sarasota County Extension. Website: <http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu>)

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If you have questions, you may submit them to pporchey@scgov.net. Subject line: Gardening question.