A Calendar for Pecan Growers

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A complete, well-rounded cultural program is essential for the annual production of high-quality pecans. Such a program must satisfy four major needs: 1) adequate tree spacing, 2) sufficient soil moisture, 3) proper soil fertility, and 4) good pest control. When one or more of these factors is neglected, production is usually reduced.

Three or more years of optimum care to the trees are usually necessary before consistent annual cropping is realized. Some variety and native trees tend to produce more consistent crops than others.

Check the following calendar each month as a reminder to give your trees the care they need.

JANUARY

Improved Groves: Remove surplus trees if crowding occurs. Prune out damaged or dead branches. Prune low branches that interfere with cultural operations.

Unimproved Groves: First year—remove all trees other than pecans. Second year—thin the remaining pecan trees to no more than 30 cross sectional square feet of trunk area per acre.

FEBRUARY

Fertilization: Apply fertilizers according to recommendations based on laboratory results of leaf samples collected during the past July. OSU Extension Facts HLA-6232 gives details for using the leaf analysis program plus additional fertilization guidelines for both commercial and home ground trees.

Control Rosette (Zinc Deficiency): If soil treatment will be used, apply zinc sulfate or zinc chelate.

To Start Trees From Non-Stratified Nuts: Soak large, well-filled nuts from latest crop for two to three days and plant approximately three inches deep. Changing of water once or twice while soaking is helpful. Stratified nuts may be planted late March.

Cut and Store Propagation Wood: Collect before growth begins. Do not allow scions to dry out. Store at 32°. For details, see OSU Extension Facts HLA-6217.

MARCH

Propagation Maintenance: Prune established grafts by selecting a central leader and removing weak crotches.

Prepare for Pests: Purchase necessary pesticides for the coming season. Service and repair the sprayer.

Merchandising: Place remaining pecans in cold storage (32°F or below).

Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Fact Sheets are also available on our website at:
http://osufacts.okstate.edu

Plant Bareroot Trees: Use freshly dug trees of adapted varieties or seedling trees grown in open-bottomed containers that use air-pruning to control the taproot. Dig the hole large enough to accommodate the root system. Prune the taproot of bareroot trees to 12 to 18 inches long. Use water to settle soil around roots. Prune top one-third to one-half.

APRIL

Whip Graft: Whip graft small trees in early April. Procedures are given in OSU Extension Facts HLA-6205.

Bark or Four-Flap Graft: Begin grafting three to five weeks after growth starts. This is usually late April in southern Oklahoma and early May in the northern part. These two grafting procedures are given in OSU Extension Facts HLA-6204 and HLA-6206. Select trees in suitable locations. When livestock graze in the grove, place grafts at least 6 or 7 feet above the ground.

Weed Control: Apply pre-emerge herbicides.

Insect Control: If phylloxera problems were present last year, spray when tree growth begins (bud-break to 2 inches shoot growth).

Control Rosette: As the leaves begin to unfold, apply foliar spray applications of zinc at the rate of 6 lbs. of zinc sulfate (36%) per acre. This is equal to 2 lbs. of 36% zinc sulfate in 100 gallons when 300 gallons of this spray mixture are applied per acre. Other commercial zinc materials are available and should be used according to label instructions, or at rates to supply equivalent amounts of zinc as recommended zinc sulfate rates.

Zinc may be included with the pesticide spray. One to three additional zinc applications applied at two- to three-week intervals may be needed when rosette is a persistent problem.

Disease Control: Spray scab susceptible varieties when leaves are about one-half normal size, April 25 to May 10 (prepollination). Check the Oklahoma pecan scab model at www.okstate.edu/~mesonet/scab/ to determine scab spray time.

MAY

Continue Propagation: Finish bark and four-flap grafting during the month. Suitable small trees may be patch budded, if advanced growth makes it too late for whip grafting.

Casebearer: Monitor nutlets for casebearer eggs. May 10 to June 1 is the usual period to check in Oklahoma. Apply spray when most of the eggs are showing pink and beginning to hatch. Check the Oklahoma pecan casebearer model at www.okstate.edu/~mesonet/texas/ to help determine when to begin scouting.

Remove Cover Crop: Disc or mow areas not pastured.

Control Rosette: Add zinc to the pest sprays.

Disease Control: Continue scab spraying if scab model indicates need.

JUNE

Insect Control: Continue monitoring nutlets for casebearer eggs. Ask your county Extension educator for casebearer spray dates. Check trees to determine the need for aphid, caterpillar, and fall webworm control sprays. Put out shuckworm pheromone traps.

Conserve Moisture: Destroy cover crop. Control weeds by mowing, discing, or chemical application.

Maintain Grafts: Force last year's graft by removing new growth and limbs below the graft. Attach stake for tying the graft. Control excessive growth of the graft by pruning back to approximately 18 inches.

Disease Control: Continue scab spray application as needed on susceptible varieties. The fungicide may be included in insecticide sprays.

JULY

Fertilization: Collect leaf samples for laboratory analyses in order to determine the amount of fertilizers to apply next February or March.

Conserve Moisture: Continue to control weeds.

Soil Drainage: Clean drainage ditches. Drain heavy soils as necessary.

Insect Control: Continue monitoring shuckworm pheromone traps. Replace them if necessary. Install traps by mid-July to monitor for pecan weevil adult emergence. Check fact sheet EPP-7190 for information on weevil trapping. Observe carefully for aphids and second generation casebearer. Spray when necessary.

Disease Control: Continue spraying susceptible varieties for scab as specified by the scab model.

AUGUST

Watch for Insect Damage: Continue monitoring shuckworm pheromone traps and cone traps. Check trees for signs of twig girdler, aphids, and caterpillars. Spray as required.

Soil Preparation: Prepare ground for harvesting. Keep vegetation mowed or graded short. If using clean cultivation, level ground and firm. Remove branches and other trash. Condition soil for cover crops.

SEPTEMBER

Tree Spacing: Mark undesirable trees for removal.

Final Soil Preparation for Harvest: Keep soil clean, cultivated, mowed, or grazed. Cattle should be removed from the orchard to allow time for droppings to break down before harvest. Locate markets.

Insect Control: Check for pecan weevil traps and spray if necessary.

Disease Control: If early season scab control has been good, late season scab development will not affect the crop and does not require control.

Cover Crop: Test soil and apply needed fertilizers. Plant the cover crop recommended by your county Extension educator. See CR-6250 for information on legumes in pecan orchards.

OCTOBER

Maintain Sodded Areas: Mow or graze sodded areas to improve harvesting. Plant container-grown trees.

Harvest Preparations: Service and repair equipment.

Pests: Post "No Trespassing" signs. Control bluejays, crows, and squirrels with chemicals, exploiters, and other firearms. Wildlife control is most efficient when operated pre-harvest and during the first part of harvest season.

NOVEMBER

Harvest Early: Prevent fire damage to nuts on ground. Pick up nuts immediately to eliminate loss to pests and prevent deterioration of kernel quality. Aerate early harvested nuts and store in unheated rooms. Select and exhibit nuts in local show. Market pecans.

Pests: Continue bird control.

DECEMBER

Harvest, Store, and Market Nuts: Complete harvest before January 1, if possible. Clean, grade, and protect nuts from rodents. Continue to market pecans.

Stratify Nuts: Select well-filled, undamaged nuts to stratify. Follow directions in OSU Extension Facts HLA-6207.

For more detailed answers to suggested activities in this calendar, consult your local county Extension educator. You are invited to attend pecan improvement meetings.

Based on original material prepared by E.L. Whitehead.

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