

The Dirt on Hill Country Gardening

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Ready, Set, Fertilize...

Driving through the Hill Country, one can see all the redbud starting to show their color, the Texas laurels starting to bloom, the catkins beginning on the trees, the crocuses, jonquils, hyacinths, and anemones popping out of the ground, the tulips and iris coming up ready to spring forth, and it means that it is time to start serious fertilizing and weeding!

Think before you fertilize knowing that about half of it ultimately ends up in the Guadalupe River and our own drinking and swimming water! Algae thrives on high-nitrogen fertilizers, making the water denser and greener with their abundance. That goes for all of the other ingredients, making quite a case for organic fertilizers, such as Sustain which is turkey manure or Medina's product, Growing Green, which was primarily called Bio Basics and is a mix of manure, lava and green sand (glaucanite), humate, volcanic rock, soil stimulate, etc.), or any certified organic fertilizer.

Fertilize lawns, shrubs, trees, roses, vines, bed's you haven't yet planted, everything. Then spread a top dressing of a half inch of compost over everything, included those struggling spots in your lawn. Now is also a good time to aerate your lawns so that the fertilizers creep down to do some good.

This is the perfect time to make your application of beneficial nematodes. These microscopic critturs are ferocious workers in controlling fleas, grubs, weevils, leaf-rollers, white flies, thrips, grasshoppers, crickets, and, yes, evil fire ants.. They prefer to be applied to damp soil, so for best results, apply after (or during) a rain, or water before application. They come in little packages with vermiculite as a holding medium. Millions come in every package, but you can't see any of them. Just trust that they are present. Mix with lukewarm water and let sit about 30 minutes or so. Then you're ready to apply. You can use a pump-up sprayer, watering can, bucket, or hose-on sprayer for application. For fire ant hills, and who doesn't have them, spray or pour a couple of cups on each fair size hill. It's okay if you disturb the hill. Apply early in the morning, late in the afternoon, or on a cloudy day. The sun will kill your nematodes faster than you realize.

Don't jump the gun on planting. The latest "last freeze date" that I remember was April 10, and the mercury plummeted to 23 degrees, devastating!

Plant of the Week. Texas Redbud, *Cercis canadensis var. texensis* is recognizable as you drive the byways of the Hill Country. It's a native. It's growth pattern is shorter and more twisted than the Eastern Redbud. The flowers are ruby red to white, and it is drought-resistant (or it wouldn't thrive in the wild). It isn't deer-proof until it has grown out of their "browse range," but it is

- Start weeding early, like 3 weeks ago! Yank the small ones out by hand or spray on one of our perfect sunny days with 20% vinegar solution
- Stop the tree pruning, but you can trim your perennials still. Particularly, salvia greggii wants a severe haircut to about 10 inches to rejuvenate it and compact its growth if you haven't already don't it. Trim it again in July for best results, but we'll remind you.
- Be patient...we'll be planting soon...and mowing, and mowing, and mowing.

We encourage your questions, comments, or your own "Personal Plant of the Week" by writing David at dsteiny@ktc.com.