



Is it too early to prune?

Yes! As hard as it may seem, it's better for the plant to wait until after the last hard freeze to prune. The pleasant weather we've had in the last week may have you itching to get outside and prune plants or rake leaves but try to resist the urge! By removing layers of dead plant matter, we are exposing the tender part of the plant to future freeze damage. Shed leaves covering your flower beds or vegetable gardens actually help to protect the soil and tender dormant plants. It serves as a blanket or bit of insulation to those plants. Whenever we prune back leaves or stems, in some species, it initiates the start of new growth and if there is still a potential for harsh cold weather, we are exposing that plant to more stress and potential damage. Plants (and livestock) that are already under stress handle taxing situations more poorly than if they were healthy. Think about yourself, going to run in a race when you're fighting a cold and sprained your ankle from taking out the trash! You certainly wouldn't perform as well in those conditions!

Backyard Chickens

You may have seen my informational piece on the local news last week regarding egg production in backyard chickens. All that boiled down to was stress! The hard freeze added a little bit of stress to many of our backyard flocks and could have slowed down their egg production for a period. If your flock was well protected from the freeze and did not have to endure the intense conditions, you may not have noticed a change in their production at all. If your chickens have slowed down production of eggs, it could be from any of the following factors: the hard freeze, wind chill and period of below-freezing temperatures forced their bodies to go from production mode to survival mode. The shorter days mean less sunlight and chickens are long-day breeders, similar to horses and other livestock. Or molting: the shedding of old feathers and rejuvenation of new (common this time of year), also keeps chickens from laying. Any stressor or multiple forms of stress on livestock (or plants) can lead to decreased production. Protecting your flock from the extreme weather temperatures, providing regular fresh feed, fresh water and adding extra feed during those cold snaps, and possibly leaving a light burning in the coop at night will help to increase egg production.

So what can we do in our gardens right now?

East Texas Planting Guide: Depending on your hardiness zone (Pittsburg/Camp County falls mostly into zone 8a and 8b) here are a few spring planting options for zone 8: spinach (January 1- February 15), carrots (January 15- March 1), cauliflower (transplants only), beets, broccoli, English peas, cabbage, kohlrabi, onions, parsley (February 1-March 1), Swiss chard, lettuce, radish, turnips (February 1- March 10), collards (February 1- March 25), mustard, (February 1- April 1). \*These dates are just estimates and may be adjusted depending on your specific location. I've also looked at several resources and the final frost date estimate ranges from end of March to mid April for our area... keep that in mind when managing your land, yard or garden.

Upcoming: the Camp-Franklin Pesticide 8-hour CEU Seminar on January 21, planning a monthly Camp County Cattlemen's meeting for the months of February-April and a Tri-County Cattlemen's Conference on March 10, tentatively. For more information or how to get registered for any of these programs, please contact the office.

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