



Going Nuts over Acorns?

Past tree stresses have contributed to the heavy crop this year.

Acorn production varies from year to year depending on summer rainfall and late spring frosts. Indeed, that is what the Tulsa area experienced – late and extreme spring freeze! Now the annual fall buffet has spread its bounty on our driveways and patios!

Acorns are produced by all species of oak found in Oklahoma. While there is some variation in animal preference between the various oak species, all are consumed by wildlife.

In central Oklahoma, the two most common oak are the post oak and the blackjack oak. In western Oklahoma, the dwarf shinnery oak is prevalent, while in the eastern portion of Oklahoma, species such as black oak, Shumard oak and southern red oak are more common.

Are all those nuts harming my tree? For the most part, the nuts and cones we're seeing this year are mostly just a nuisance. The wildlife managers tell us heavy drop or "mast" years are a boon because acorns and other nuts provide high-fat food that is valuable to deer, turkey, insects, and other wildlife. Heavy nut or cone production can cause reductions in growth as trees shift their available resources to producing reproductive structures instead of growth. However, heavy mast years are part of a natural cycle and should not cause long-term issue for trees.

In Oklahoma, hard mast trees often produce sporadically in a five- to seven-year cycle. During this cycle, there may be one excellent hard mast crop, one mast crop failure, and three to five years of poor to moderate mast production. Because of the periodic nature of mast crops, a variety of flora species must be present to provide alternate food sources and more stable habitat conditions. Which explains why in some years squirrels eat many of our blooming flowers and even attic wiring and the patio chair covers.

Wildlife species and insects attempt to acquire as much nutrition as possible before this fall resource is exhausted. From a wildlife standpoint, these are important trees to retain. Look for the empty caps as sign of consumption of the acorns.

Wildlife truly appreciates the messy acorns. Us home-owners? Not so much. Acorns have their value...so we live with them Nuts!

