

### COASTAL GARDENER COLUMN

**Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.**

**Q:** I have a four-year-old persimmon tree. It is producing a good crop of fruit this year. I am informed that persimmons are a “self-reliant” tree and do not need supplemental fertilizer. Our yard is composed of deep sandy soils. Can our persimmon retain its productivity in this environment without adding some nutrients?

**A:** I am not sure what a “self-reliant” tree is. The term “self-reliant” used in this way is new to me. In my experience all fruit trees need proper care and some supplemental fertilization if they are to remain healthy, vigorous and productive over many years. An exception may be legume species plants which fix their own nitrogen from the air, thus are not dependent on the nitrogen present in the soil. Even legumes, however, may become deficient in other nutrients which then need to be supplied by adding fertilizers. The sandy soils prevalent in many locations on the Central Coast are very poor in their nutrient content and must be augmented with organic matter and/or fertilizers to grow good crops. A four-year-old persimmon is just reaching maturity, and larger crops of persimmons may be expected in the coming years if the tree is maintained in good vigor. A mature persimmon tree requires about one pound of actual nitrogen (N) per year. Therefore, enough fertilizer must be applied to deliver one pound of N per tree per year. If you have a fertilizer that is 15% N, you must apply 6.6 pounds of this fertilizer per tree per year to deliver one pound of N.

Applications of fertilizer should be divided into at least two applications, one in the spring, and one in the fall. On our sandy Central Coast soils 3 to 4 applications made through the growing season are recommended so the fertilizer is not lost to leaching down past the root zone. Make the first application in late February/early March as the tree wakes up from winter dormancy. Apply the last dose in late October as the tree leaves begin to turn color. Space the other one to two applications at equal intervals in between.

## Coastal Gardener Column

Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.

November 14, 2007

---

**An added note:** Iron chlorosis is a common problem in many plant species on the Central Coast. Persimmons are particularly susceptible. Symptoms are initially expressed as a yellowing between the leaf veins in twig tip leaves. Since iron is immobile in plants, the older basal leaves remain green as young twig tip leaves become chlorotic. As growth continues, new leaves may be very pale yellow to almost white. In time, these chlorotic leaves turn brown and die prematurely. Sometimes the twigs bearing these leaves also die back. Iron chlorosis can be treated with foliar sprays of chelated iron, but the sprays must be started early while leaves are young. Repeated applications are usually necessary. Long-term treatment of iron chlorosis requires making the soil in the root zone under the tree more acidic. This can be done by adding soil sulfur. Make one- to two- inch diameter holes six to eight inches deep at four to six locations around the tree just inside the dripline. Fill these holes with soil sulfur. Fertilizer may be mixed with the soil sulfur in the holes in a two parts sulfur to one part fertilizer mixture. My office has a pamphlet on soils and fertilizers for Central Coast gardeners. If you wish to receive a copy, contact the Coastal Gardener.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**