

FBMG Help Desk  
**Question of the Week**

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Why are there so many more acorns falling from my tree than in recent years?

*Multiple factors may be involved...*



# What is an Acorn?

A simple, but valuable resource  
within the ecosystem



Acorns are essentially the fruit of various varieties of oak tree. There are hundreds of species of oak tree, 90 of which are native to the United States and several varieties can be located within Texas.

*You will find that most neighborhoods contain oak trees, as they are often planted by the developers as a hardy shade tree that matures and provides privacy*

As we will discuss, the simple acorn plays a large part in the active ecosystem of your neighborhood



# What is a “Mast”?

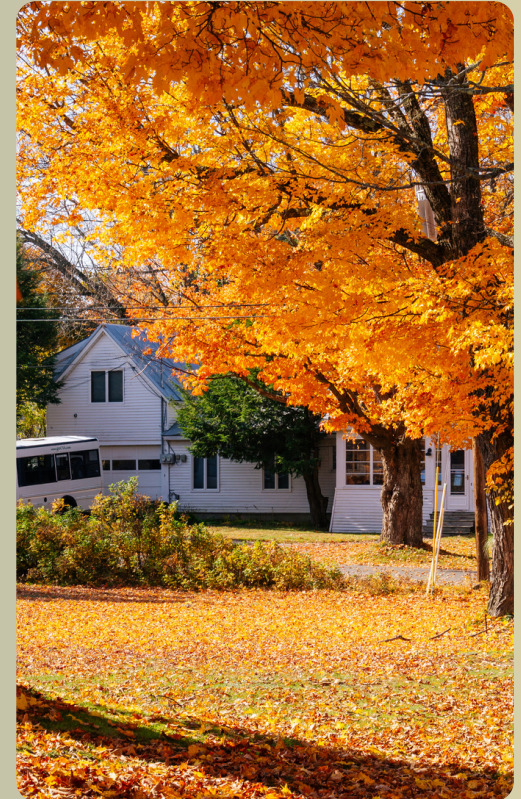
*The term “Mast” or “Mast Year” refers to higher than normal acorn production*

When oaks produce an abundance of acorns, it is sometimes called a “mast”

The term Mast comes from the word Masticate, which means ‘to chew’ and refers oftentimes to food.

- *A Mast Year is one where oaks and other nut producing trees are heavy with acorns*
- *Predicting mast years is difficult to do precisely, but most scientists believe that climate and other factors play a part*
- *Mast years are important to wildlife as acorns are a food source*

Oak trees are monoecious, meaning that both male and female flowers exist on the same tree - this is important to remember as we discuss how the weather and other factors can help predict a Mast Year





# *Weather & other influences on Mast*

## *Pay attention in Spring and Summer*

*While not totally predictable, Mast Years are oftentimes predicated by certain weather and evolutionary factors. Recognizing these factors may predict abundant production, and therefore abundant wildlife.*



*Acorn production can vary wildly from year to year  
Typically, oak trees produce a good Mast crop every 3-4 years*



- Favorable weather at the time of oak flowering (correct amount of rain, gentle winds) can predict a heavy Mast*
- An abundance of 'consumers' - squirrels, deer, etc. can predict a heavy Mast*
- Disease, stress and pathogens sometimes play a part in acorn production*





# Effects of Mast Year on Wildlife

## *Who benefits from acorn production?*

Acorns are a vital food source to several species of wildlife, including squirrels, deer, turkey, foxes, chipmunks, blue jays and wood ducks



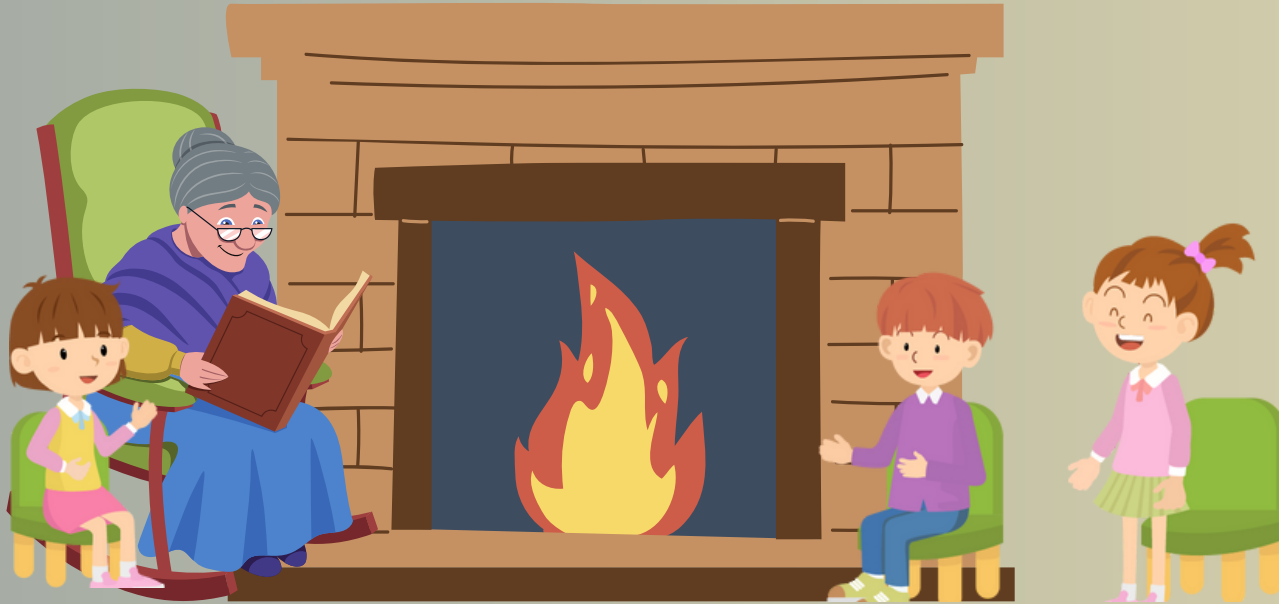
- Animal Populations: Mast years often produce (or sometimes are the result of) increased animal populations
  - While squirrels and other ‘consumers’ benefit from high acorn production, predators also benefit (bobcat, hawk, owls, etc.)
- The Oak Tree: Some scientists hypothesize that high Mast Years are nature’s way of producing sufficient nuts to overwhelm the ‘consumers’ and still provide enough acorns to ensure survival of the species, therefore the oak trees themselves benefit from higher nut production



According to Folklore

# *The Old-Timers Say*

*Watch the critters, the weather and the plants.*



If the squirrels are extra busy storing nuts they are preparing for a colder winter.

If the trees are dropping more nuts you should be preparing as well.



*\*\*\* Folklore is just that, founded in observation and stories from generation to generation, not scientifically based research \*\*\**



***Do you have questions  
about your home  
landscape and plants?***

***Contact the Fort Bend  
Master Gardener Help Desk***

***Email:  
FortBendmg@ag.tamu.edu***

***Phone:  
281-341-7068***

***The Help Desk is manned  
Monday thru Friday,  
9am-Noon***

***acorns | Gardening in the Panhandle (ufl.edu)***

***Acorns Abound!***

***Acorns, Acorns Everywhere | Extension (unh.edu)***

***Acorns, Acorns Everywhere***

***Managing Hardwood Stands for Acorn Production |***

***Mississippi State University Extension Service***  
***(msstate.edu) Managing Hardwood Stands for***

***Acorn Production***

***Acorns: Are They Safe to Eat? (webmd.com) Diet &***  
***Weight Management***

***Are Your Trees Dropping Acorns Like Crazy because***  
***winter will be tough? - Farmers' Almanac - Plan Your***  
***Day. Grow Your Life. (farmersalmanac.com)***

***The Acorn Story | Gardening in Orange County New***  
***York (cornell.edu)***

***My oak tree produced just a few acorns this year.***

***Why? | Horticulture and Home Pest News***  
***(iastate.edu)***

***How Insects Predict the Weather | Proverbs &***  
***Folklore | The Old Farmer's Almanac***

***Cones and acorns appear in copious quantities this***  
***fall - Landscaping (msu.edu)***

***Why Are There so Many Acorns This Year?***  
***(purdue.edu)***