Gardening Q& A

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Q. We moved into a neighborhood with deer and have had several bad experiences with the hungry pests eating new landscape plants. We thought they would pass on roses with thorns and live oaks! They ate them to the ground! What can we plant?

A. Deer are definitely a challenge but there is a significant list of plants that they don’t eat in most situations. Texas mountain laurel, esperanza, viburnum, thyralis, cenizo, primrose jasmine, and yaupon holly are shrubs that come to mind. They will eat and rub (girdle) most young shade trees so new plantings have to be protected by a sturdy temporary fence. They usually don’t eat lantana, iris, salvias, rosemary and four o’clocks. Even for plants that they don’t usually eat, apply a deterrent like Liquid Fence once per week for 3 weeks to discourage them from pulling up the new plants out of curiosity. For a more extensive list of deer-proof plants go to plantanswers.com.

Q. Our broccoli is producing new heads after the initial large heads were harvested but the cauliflower isn’t doing anything. Will it eventually produce more cauliflower?

A. No, I just pull the cauliflower plants out and put them in the compost pile after the initial head is harvested. I have never had them produce any side heads like broccoli.

Q. My primula and cyclamen have been spectacular this year. The weather has been perfect and they look great. How long will they continue blooming? Another question, is there any slug and snail bait for the primula that is an organic control? The one I am using now has carbaryl as an active ingredient and I would rather have an organic control.

A. Yes, the weather has been perfect for cyclamen and primula. Unless it gets hot in early April, they should bloom through April. There are several organic options for slug and snail control. The granule I am using now has sulfur for the active ingredient. It seems to be working well. Check the labels at your favorite nursery or call around.

Q. We would like to aerate and top dress our 5 year old zoysia lawn but are older on a set income so can only afford the aeration being done by a contractor. Is it worthwhile to aerate without the topdressing?

A. The most benefit accrues when the 2 activities are combined but both are worth doing separately. Aeration will reduce soil compaction and allow moisture and oxygen to more easily penetrate to the grass roots.

Q. Are apple trees pruned just like peaches with the goal being an open middle?

A. No, apples are pruned less than peaches. They have a central leader with fruit producing wood left in a whorl on the main trunk. Fruit can be produced on spurs and other branches. Visit plantanswers.com to review options for fruit tree pruning and diagrams to follow.

Q.Is it too late for us to grow our own tomatoes from seed? We found some interesting heirloom varieties that we want to try.

A. It requires about 6 weeks to produce your own transplants from seed. If you planted them now, they would be ready in early April which should be enough time to produce a crop.