Gardening Question and Answer

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* Q. What is the purple martin situation? It seems like we usually have birds in place by this time but we have not even seen any scouts!

1. Based on phone calls we received on our Milberger’s Gardening South Texas last weekend, it is an inconsistent situation. Some folks South of San Antonio and even in the City have pairs in place while others have not even seen scouts. I am usually late to receive breeding birds but in response to purple martins moving into a neighbor about 1 mile away, I put the houses up. I have English sparrows and starlings so far, but no martins.

* Q. Please remind us, what are some of the preemergent herbicides that will prevent sand burs? They should be applied now, correct?

1. Crabgrass Preventer, Halt, Dimension, Amaze and XL are among those that work to reduce sand bur germination. Yes, apply them now and again 90 days for season long control. Read the label to make sure that the herbicide you are considering will meet your needs and that you can conform to its application requirements.

* Q. Our live oak leaves are falling en masse right now. Remind us what the environmentally appropriate options are. Thanks.

1. Use live oak leaves as mulch. They work especially well in the vegetable garden and shrub border. They can also be collected and placed in the compost pile. One of the easiest options is to let them decompose on the lawn. Speed up decomposition by running the lawn mower over them. The leaves provide some nutrients and organic material. Rather than sending the leaves to the landfill, give the bags to your neighbors that will use them.

* Q. I want to grow some zinnias this summer by seed. Do you think that is a reasonable way to go for summer color in full sun? What seeds should I look for? When can I plant them?

1. My favorite zinnias to grow from seed are California Giant and Cactus. Both provide good cut flowers and will reseed themselves all summer. They can be planted any time now.

* Q. We want to plant summer squash now. What do we have to do to control the squash vine borers?

1. Every week apply some Sevin to the squash growing point. It can be the powder or the spray. An alternate way to fight squash vine borers is to plant tatuma or another of the square stemmed squash. To me they taste the same as crookneck but seem to better able to ward off the borers.

* Q. My mother wants me to select and plant one of the new Satsuma selections in her yard. Are Arctic Frost, Orange Frost, Moy Rich or Bumper just as good as Meito and the older selections? Which would you plant?

1. I think they have a tastier fruit because of the Changsha tangerine parentage plus they have 3-4 degrees more cold tolerance. Bumper is unmatched for the number of fruit produced. I have 3 of the 4 selections listed. I like all of them. Orange Frost may be the most popular.

* Q. How can we tell if we are about to purchase the authentic “Gold Star” esperanza? We are nervous because last year we got 2 that said “Gold Star” but did not bloom until late fall and only at the top of the plant.

1. The “Gold Star” is a blooming machine. It should be blooming when you buy it, even if it is only in a one gallon container.