Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. We have just moved into this area from farther north and are excited by the gardening opportunities, even though it is somewhat overwhelming. To start with what kinds of oaks can we plant as shade trees?

A. Live oaks, Texas red oak, Schumardi oak, Lacey oak, bur oak, chinkapin oak, and Mexican white oak all do well in our region. The Texas red oak and Mexican white oak grow the fastest. Other good species to consider are cedar elm and Mexican sycamore. For information on eventual size and soil preferences visit plantanswers.com. For a good basic landscaping and gardening text obtain Neil Sperry’s Lone Star Gardening and Greg Grant’s and Roger Holmes’ Home Landscaping: Texas.

Q. I have noticed that we are starting to get spider mites on our tomatoes. What was the ingredients and mixing directions for that organic control that you recommend?

A. To help prevent spider mites and to slow down their reproduction apply a spray of 2 tablespoons of seaweed extract in one gallon of water once per week to the underside of the leaves. Once the mites appear, increase the spray frequency to 2 times per week. At this point you may want to pull your spring planted tomatoes in favor of new transplants planted before the end of July. Research indicates that you harvest more tomatoes with the two crops rather than trying to carry old tomatoes through the summer.

Q. Which are the tough roses we can grow without having to spray every week.

A. Belinda’s Dream, Grandma’s Yellow, Katy Road (Carefree Beauty) and Knockout are tough modern roses. Martha Gonzales, Mrs. Dudley Cross and Butterfly Rose are old-fashioned roses that bloom over a long period and don’t require regular spraying. All of the roses on the list qualify as Xeriscape plants in that they can survive with very little water. All, however bloom better with regular irrigation. Belinda’s Dream and Katy Road are pink. Martha Gonzales is red. Knockout is available in red or pink. Mrs. Dudley Cross is cream colored and butterfly rose changes color from yellow to pink to red

Q. We want to plant zoysia grass but our nurseryman, who only sells Bermuda and St Augustine, says that zoysia is too hard to care for to consider. What do you say?

A. I like zoysia grass. It has some shade tolerance but less than St Augustine grass. To keep it green zoysia requires just as much water as St Augustine but it can go dormant if water is not available and greens up when the rains begin again. Zoysia has almost as much traffic tolerance as Bermuda grass. Zoysia is harder to mow than Bermuda or St Augustine but a sharp rotary mower works if you mow every week.

Q. What are the insects on our apples that are dark brown with long legs? They fly off when we get near. Are they hurting the apples?

A. The insects you describe are leaf-footed bugs, one of the stink bugs. They feed on the apples by injecting their digestive juices and then extracting the resultant stew. The apples can still be eaten by gardeners but the stink bugs leave deformed fruit with scar tissue. In my experience Sevin spray is the only control for stink bugs that works. I use it for peaches, tomatoes, and blackberries. Check the label to make sure it can be used for apples.