

Gardening Q&A

Distribute 05-24-2018

Q. I saw a 20 ft. tall, round crowned tree with large white blossoms when going to the store the other morning. Any idea what it would be. Are they available at all nurseries? Are they easy to grow?

A. It sounds like you are describing the Mexican olive. It is a wonderful landscape tree for full sun. Most bloom over a long season from spring through fall. They are drought tolerant and not fussy about soil. During an especially cold winter some plants may freeze back to the roots, but it is not usually a problem. Many nurseries offer small specimens, but they are fast growers. If your local nursery does not have them call around.

Q. You recommend removing live oak suckers with a string mower or the lawn mower. Why isn't that a problem in terms of oak wilt? Lots of fresh wounds for the sap beetles to feed on and distribute fungal spores.

A. Apparently the small diameter of the stems that are cut means that the parent tree can quickly mobilize the defensive chemicals to block the fungal spore development. I have also heard experts state that the small diameter stems close to the soil surface are not utilized by sap beetles.

Q. We are harvesting ripe blackberries, but they have a bitter taste. My neighbor offered the opinion that the stink bugs that infested the fruit before we sprayed them with insecticide caused the bitter taste. Is that possible? We washed them well.

A. I believe your neighbor is right. Stink bugs on blackberries are often called "bitter bugs" because of this issue. They need to be controlled with Sevin or malathion as soon as they are discovered on the fruit. Try soaking the berries in water for several hours. Change out the water several times during the soaking. Follow label instructions on the insecticides that you use.

Q. It has been relatively dry this spring and we have sandy soil so we water our new viburnum hedge with the sprinkler twice per week. Despite the frequency, the plants wilt between watering and are not growing well. I thought the sandankwa viburnum was a recommended shrub for our area?

A. Yes, Sandankwa viburnum does make a good hedge, especially in partial shade. Instead of watering with a sprinkler, water at the base of each plant with the handheld hose or lay down drip irrigation with the emitter over the root system. It sounds like the root ball is not receiving enough water from the sprinkler to wet the root ball. For shrubs or trees that are not fully established the root system is limited to the area right under the plant. A lawn sprinkler spreads the water over a wide area but not very deeply.

Q. The Bermuda grass is moving into our shrub border and flower garden from the lawn area. It is very difficult to pull by hand. Would a herbicide work to control the Bermuda grass without hurting the garden plants?

A. Yes, use one of the many contact herbicides for grasses. They include Ornamec, Grass-Be-Gone, Poast, Fusilade, and Over-the-Top. They work very well to kill the Bermuda grass without hurting shrubs, perennials or annual flowers. Follow label instructions.