Gardening Question and Answers

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Q. You were discussing the value of aeration and top dressing on the Milberger Gardening South Texas Show. I didn’t hear that you described what kind of aerator was required? Would it work to use those shoes with spikes on them rather than renting a gasoline driven machine?

A. Any type of aeration has some value but the most value is achieved if the apparatus cuts out plugs of sod and soil to create channels to the roots. The spiked shoes do not necessarily penetrate as deeply as the plug cutter. The plug cutter also provides minimal compression to the soil adjacent and at the bottom of the aeration channel. It cuts the plug out and deposits it on the soil surface. One goal of aeration is to address soil compaction. The shoe spikes makes its channel by compressing the soil around the spike penetration.

Q. What are going to be the recommended tomato varieties for this spring? Will there be anything new?

A. The still secret “Rodeo Tomato” will be new. Every year Dr. Parsons, the Gardening Volunteers, and local AgriLife Extension researchers work together to identify a tomato variety that performed well in the year’s plant trials. In addition to the “Rodeo Tomato”, Tycoon, Solar Fire, Celebrity, BHN 968, and 444, and will be among those recommended.

Q. We were at a party this weekend. The yard next door to our host had two orange flowered plants that were blooming up a storm. One looked like a miniature trumpet creeper. The vine grew more upright then horizontal in addition to having small flowers and leaves. While we were admiring it a hummingbird visited the blooms. The second flower was also a vine. It had rich orange colored daisy shaped flowers about the sizes of half dollars. It was a traditional tangle type of vine. Sorry about the descriptions but can you make a guess?

A. The vine that looks like a miniature trumpet vine is probably a cape honeysuckle. Coming from the Southern Hemisphere they always bloom in the fall and into a mild winter. The other vine is more difficult to identify but it sounds like Mexican flame vine. They also bloom in the fall.

Q. The oak wilt threat makes me nervous. Our neighborhood is dominated by oaks and despite my nagging not everyone paints the wounds on their oak trees. What are some recommended shade trees that are not susceptible to oak wilt?

A. Cedar elm, Mexican sycamore, Chinese pistache, and Montezuma cypress are four that I would recommend. Anaqua is a slow growing native that eventually makes a good shade tree. Loquat and the large crape myrtles like Basham’s Party Pink also are good shade trees in the right place.

Q. Something is stealing my suet blocks from the tree where we hang them. They take the wire mesh feeder and the block. Would a raccoon or opossum do that? What is your recommendation to end the theft?

A. The thief is most likely a raccoon. You can buy a raccoon size live trap or it may be possible to borrow a live trap from the animal control or Texas Wildlife office. They can also instruct you how to deal with any animals that you catch.