Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. We have room for some small and medium size trees in our landscape. There are both locations in full sun and in partial shade. What are some of the recommendations?

A. In the sun consider vitex. It is drought tolerant, deer proof and has attractive purple blooms. Vitex grows to 25 ft. tall. It has an open sprawling growth habit. Texas persimmon is a native tree that also grows to 25 ft. tall. Its blooms are not as showy as vitex but the crown is more compact and disciplined. The female Texas persimmon trees produce edible fruit that are loved by birds and other wildlife. Loquat is evergreen with large tongue-shaped leaves. It grows to 35 ft. tall in sun or shade with an upright disciplined crown. It is often used as a row tree bordering driveways. Loquat is blooming now and if the winter is mild it will produce tasty plums. Also consider redbud, desert willow, Mexican olive, and Mexican plum. Visit plantanswers.com for a more information on the listed trees and a more extensive list.

Q. When can we begin harvesting our spinach and leaf lettuce? We have Ashley spinach and Crawford lettuce that we got from you over at a gardening event.

A. Spinach and leaf lettuce can be harvested leaf by leaf as you need it once it is obvious that it is established and producing new foliage. I always leave two-thirds of the foliage on the plant and harvest a number of times over a long season. Some gardeners prefer to cut off most of the leaves of a particular plant 2 or 3 times after it has produced a lush but tender head.

Q. Tell us again what we can use our pecan and red oak leaves for. We are trying to convince my grandmother that it is not environmentally appropriate to rake and bag the leaves for the landfill. She thinks we are just trying to get out of work!

Q. If you do not have a suffocating amount of leaves, they will decompose on the lawn to provide nutrients and organic material. You can speed up the process by running the mower over the leaves. The leaves also make excellent mulch for the shrub border and the garden. Leaves can also be used for raw material in the compost pile. It is a double negative if leaves are bagged and sent to the landfill. The organic material is wasted and so is the expensive space in the landfill that the leaves unnecessarily fill.

Q. When should we move our bougainvillea into shelter for the winter? They don’t need light do they?

A. Thanksgiving is a good time to move bougainvillea, hibiscus, plumeria and other tropical container plants into shelter. Once temperatures near 40degrees they shut down. Oriental hibiscus and most other tropical plants require light in their winter shelter but plumeria and bougainvillea do not. Without light, it does take them longer to re-leaf in the spring. Move them to shelter now.

Q. We just purchased a new home with a great garden space. Is there anything we can plant now?

A. For vegetables plant spinach, onion, and cole crops (broccoli related) transplants. Use seed to plant English peas, lettuce, turnips, and carrots. For flowers plant snapdragon, stocks, dianthus, pansies, alyssum, and calendula transplants in the sun. In the shade plant cyclamen or primrose.