

## Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. What are the tall shrubs (12ft.) that are blooming now with orange flowers? They are very attractive and in the neighborhood where I saw them, they were blooming in sun and shade. The deer also seemed to pass them up.

A. I think you are seeing pomegranate. They will bloom in full sun or under deciduous trees from mid-March until May. Some are ornamental and only bloom but there are numerous fruit bearing varieties. They produce better in full sun. Pomegranate are deer proof in most situations. The fruit is nutritious and can be produced without insect sprays.

Q. In an article last summer you identified the blooming plants that were most attractive to butterflies as nectar sources. I misplaced the list. I know one was tropical milkweed. It is now available at my favorite retail nursery and I wanted to get it and a few of each of the other top nectar plants. What are the others?

A. Based on my gardening experiences in Central Texas, I believe mistflower, zinnias, tropical milkweed, porter weed, and duranta are top nectar sources. Mistflower is a perennial that freezes back every winter that blooms from about April 1 to Thanksgiving. The weak-stemmed fine leaved plant forms a mound of foliage covered with blue or white blooms that attract most species of butterflies including monarchs, queens, and gulf fritillaries. Zinnias bloom over the same period as mistflower and attract the same species plus all the swallowtails. The California Giants and Cactus zinnia selections are very popular with butterflies. Tropical milkweed has attractive orange blooms the provide nectar to all the species mentioned, plus milkweeds (tropical and native) are the sole site for Monarch egg-laying. Porter weed is an interesting annual with long weeping stems that produce short pieces of intensely colored blooms of red or purple that bring in butterflies. It is claimed that the small flowers offer very potent nectar. Duranta is a shrub that produces showy blue or white blooms on weeping woody stems that will be covered with butterflies in late summer and fall.

Q. My tomatoes look great. What insects should I watch for and what are the treatments? I want to maximize production of fruit.

A. Watch for stink bugs and leaf-footed bugs. They are tough to control. Use Sevin spray if they show up. Slow down the production of spider mites by using a preventive spray under the leaves of 2 tablespoons of seaweed extract per gallon of water under the leaves every week. For caterpillars use a Bt based spray such as Dipel or Thuricide if you detect them.

Q. Our St Augustine lawn has begun to grow. We will be fertilizing as you prescribe after we have mown real grass twice. Our issue is that we have an open bag of "winterizer" fertilizer left. Can I use it up before I purchase and use the recommended slow release lawn fertilizer?

A. Slow-release lawn fertilizer is best to use for the summer lawn but a fast release "winterizer" will work. You didn't say how much you had left or how much fertilizer you needed. One option would be to

mix the remaining “winterizer” with a portion of slow release fertilizer. I am with you, in that, I don’t like to leave opened bags of fertilizer sitting, but if you tape the bag shut the fertilizer should last until this fall. It could also be the fertilizer you use first in the vegetable and flower garden this summer.

Q. Is it too late to plant gladiolas for cut flowers this spring?

A. It is pretty late but if you already have the bulbs I recommend that you go ahead and plant them. Most should germinate and bloom. Next year plant the glads from mid- February to mid- March.