

Gardening Question and Answer

Distribute April 3, 2017

Q. Our rosemary froze back in January but now I notice that it is beginning to green up high on the stems. Does that mean the stems and roots are alive after all? Should I still replace them or will they fill in and look just as good as before? Should I cut them back at ground level?

A. I would be content with letting them fill in along the stems. It won't take long for them to look as good as they did before the freezes. They may also resprout if you cut them off at ground level but it may take a while for them to regrow.

Q. We have had rat problems. When we asked the pest control representative why they are so prevalent this year, he blames it on our bird feeders! Is it possible that our bird feeding is supporting a large rat population like he claims?

A. Yes, it is possible. To counteract the bird feed as a food source for the rodents only place enough seed in the feeders each morning to be eaten by the birds by early afternoon. Rats feed at night. Another tactic is to stop feeding now until about October 1. The birds are territorial in the nesting season and usually have access to many feed sources in the lush summer landscape. Begin feeding again when the migrants arrive and through the winter.

Q. What are the flowers we should plant for summer color?

A. In shady gardens plant waxleaf begonias, coleus, and caladiums. A relatively new plant is the "Whopper" begonia. It is related to the waxleaf begonia but has bigger leaves and blooms plus it grows twice as large. In the sun plant zinnias, cosmos, moss rose and/or purslane. There are many selections of zinnias including "Dreamland", California giant, cactus, dahlia flowered, zinnia linearis, Lilliput, and "Profusion". Many of the zinnia varieties can be grown from seed.

Q. What are the best tasting tomatoes? It seems like the old-fashioned selections that my grandfather grew in Ohio tasted better than the hybrids we grow here in our garden.

A. Lots of folks remember better tasting tomatoes from the past. There may be some truth to the idea if the tomatoes were grown in areas with cooler nights and a longer season. Because of our hot summers we have more success with tomatoes that set their fruit over a short season before the heat of deep summer. Short of raising your tomatoes "up north" find BHN 968 transplants, it rates as my best tasting tomato. The breeders of the Rodeo tomato "HM 1823" also make the claim that it has the best combination of acid and sugar for good taste. Another selection "Tasty Lee" also claims to have a great taste.

Q. Why is it best to wait for the “real grass” to be mowed twice before we fertilize the lawn? I am anxious for the lawn grass to begin growing.

A. During the winter our “real lawn grasses,” St Augustine, Bermuda, and zoysia grass lose some of their root system. Uptake of nutrients requires the roots in place along with active growing leaves. Apply your fertilizer too early and some of the nitrogen is lost because there isn't enough root system and leaf surface to uptake the nutrients.