

## Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. What is the small tree that is blooming purple now? The blooms look a little like lilacs.

A. You are probably seeing vitex which is also called Texas lilac and chaste tree. Vitex grows in full sun to 25 feet tall. It is pest free and very drought tolerant. Deer do not eat the foliage or stems but butterflies and hummingbirds use the blooms as a nectar source. Vitex is an exotic plant native to Southern Europe and Central Asia and has been identified as some gardeners as invasive. In my neighborhood I have never seen any reseeding or spreading.

Q. We are harvesting lots of BHN 968 cherry tomatoes. They taste wonderful but some have some yellow blotches on them. Any idea what that might be? Is it a disease?

A. Tomato plants that are infected with a virus will sometimes have yellow blotches but I believe yours are probably caused by stink bug hits. Leaf-footed bugs and other stink bugs inject digestive juices into the developing or mature fruit and then extract the soup. The action causes the yellowing and sometimes scar tissue. Peaches and blackberries are also very susceptible. Stink bugs are tough to control because they are relatively large, armored, and mobile. Sevin spray is the most effective control.

Q. Why is our lawn so yellow? With all the rain it seems like it should be green and lush.

A. There are several causes of a yellow lawn. If your winter lawn was over seeded with rye or infested with rescue grass or annual blue grass, those cool weather plants are declining now. They look dry and yellow. The Bermuda or St Augustine grass will eventually fill-in. Some St Augustine grass is yellow because the soil is still cool and the roots are still spreading. Those conditions make it hard for the grass plant to extract enough iron from the soil. Applying a lawn fertilizer such as slow-release 19-5-9 with iron will help. You can also use a hose end sprayer to apply chelated iron or apply the product Iron-Plus.

Q. We planted okra 3 weeks ago by seed but only one plant in the row has emerged from the soil. The seed was Clemson spineless labeled for 2017. Do you think it was bad?

A. Okra seed likes warm air and soil temperatures. It still may come up. If you planted the seed deeper than one-quarter inch rough up the soil to see what the seed is doing. That may be enough to stimulate germination. Okra seed lasts well, the seed is probably viable. If you have some left in the packet just reseed at one-quarter inch deep. You could also purchase some new seed.

Q. Is it okay to mow down live oak seedlings growing under the tree? They only seem to sprout from one of the 5 oak trees in my yard. Are there any other strategies to control them?

A. You called the little oaks seedlings but seem to understand that they are sprouts from the roots of one of the oak trees. Mowing with the lawn mower or string mower is the best control, especially if you cut them early. The cutting does not seem to provide an entry for oak wilt. The small diameter stems seem to allow the trees defenses to prevent infection from spore carrying sap beetles. Just as you have discovered in your landscape some live oak trees send up sprouts and some don't.