

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. We bought a new house that has an existing fence that is 6 feet tall to keep the deer out of the lawn and gardens. The fence is functional but not attractive. What are the options for a hedge to front the fence? The entire area is full sun. We thought red-tipped photinia would work but the deer ate the 2 gallon transplants down to nubbins!

A. One obvious option is Texas mountain laurel. Plant the mountain laurel 6 feet apart for a relatively dense hedge. Sandankwa viburnum would also work. Sandankwa form an attractive 6 feet tall hedge but require disciplined watering at the base the first 2 growing seasons to become established. Plant them 6 feet apart. Both Texas mountain laurel and sandankwa are evergreen and deer proof. For extra protection against curious deer that may eat at or pull out normally deer proof plants, spray them with the product Liquid Fence once/week for 4 weeks.

Q. Tell me about the Phalaenopsis orchid. I received one as a retirement gift. My friend said they were easy to care for which is hard to believe because it is an orchid and so beautiful.

A. Your friend is correct, Phalaenopsis orchids are easy to care for. Find a window with a southern or eastern exposure so the orchid receives some sun. They are usually planted in bark or some other coarse medium. Let water run through the bark every week. Once per month or more use a soluble fertilizer in the watering can. The mixture can be caught in a saucer as it drains through the planting medium and used again. The blooms will last for at least 4 months each year.

Q. We need a new lawn and like the idea of using buffalo grass. Why isn't it used more often for a lawn in this area? It is a native plant and very drought tolerant. The sod looks good.

A. Buffalo grass is difficult to use as a lawn. It's ideal environment is in full sun, west of the San Antonio area in the 25 inch or less rain zones. It does not make a thick sod and in moist areas it quickly becomes overrun by weeds, especially Bermuda grass. Treat it like a groundcover and mow it at 5.5 inches helps slow down the weeds. It also does best on hot dry slopes with a southern or western exposure.

Q. My spring tomatoes have done very well but now they appear to be declining. The leaves look faded and small webs have shown up. It looks like spider mites. Should we attempt to control the pests or can I pull these plants now and then replant for the fall in mid-July?

A. If you have spider mites at an advanced infection level like you describe, or plan is the best way to proceed. If your compost pile is closer than 100 feet to the garden, it is best to put the spider mite infected plants in the green recycling bin or garbage bin. Pull any weeds and remove other hiding places in the planting area to reduce remnant populations of spider mites that could move directly to your new plants.

Q. Is it too late to plant zinnias, begonias and other hot weather annuals?

A. No, go ahead and plant them. Also consider pentas, moss roses, cosmos, and coleus, they will bloom at least until Thanksgiving.