

Question and Answer Column

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Q. My neighbor planted his tomatoes for the fall. Does it make sense to plant tomatoes when the temperatures reach 100 degrees F during the day? Surely they will just dry up?

A. It is more difficult to plant tomatoes in the fall when temperatures are high but if you use the right varieties and follow the recommended procedures the crop will be productive. Visit plantanswers.com for the full length article. In summary plant one or more of the determinate heat-setting varieties. HM1824, Tycoon, Red Deuce, Valley Cat, Celebrity, 444, Phoenix, and 602 are large tomatoes. Roma Surprise and Surefire are medium size fruit that are especially fast to set fruit. BHN 968 and Ruby Crush are cherry tomatoes. Prepare the soil by incorporating 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow-release lawn fertilizer into every 100 sq. ft. of planting area. Moisten the bed before planting and then place the transplants on 3 ft. centers. Enclose each plant in a tomato cage. It works best if you water every day until this heat breaks. Cover the roots with live oak leaves or some other fine textured mulch.

Q. I wanted you to know that I am amazed by the Whopper begonia. Despite the huge leaves the plants are doing very well in the 100 degree heat. I am watering every 3 days when the leaves let me know they need water by changing color rather than wilting.

A. I agree that they are an excellent choice for containers or flower beds in shade or partial sun. Some of my plants even made it through the 19 degree cold spell we had last winter. It is not too late to plant more for this summer and fall.

Q. What are your thoughts about mulberries as shade trees? We have a large one at the front of our lot that is beginning to drop branches in the heat and wind. I hate to have it removed because it is a favorite food source of the birds in my landscape but fear it is a threat to the utility wires and fence.

A. Surely mulberries are reseeding all over your yard? Select one or more to be allowed to grow at the back of your lot away from the house, utility lines, and fence. They are also easy to transplant and grow fast. Remove the tree that is a threat and replace it as a bird food source with one of the seedlings allowed to grow in a more remote part of the yard.

Q. Well, we have taken your advice and to save water (and our budget) we have quit watering our Bermuda grass lawn. I like the green lawn better than the brown version but it doesn't look too bad. One problem is that a few weeds are poking up above the Bermuda grass level. It would look better if they were gone. What is the solution?

A. I believe the easiest solution is to mow the lawn at its normal level of 1.5 inches or less every two weeks. The weeds will be slow to regrow as the summer progresses.

Q. We are growing tropical and the native tuberosa milkweed for the monarch butterflies. They are loaded with the yellow aphids and look dried out. Are the aphids a problem? How should I control them?

A. The aphids are present on most milkweeds. They are not usually considered a threat to the plants. The dry look is probably due to the 100 degree heat and lack of rain this summer. You don't want to

spray the aphids with an insecticide that may affect the butterflies. Increase the amount of irrigation that you provide to the milkweeds and use your hose to spray off some of the aphids. The water pressure will remove most of the aphids and won't hurt the Monarchs.