

Gardening Question and Answer Article

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Q. Why aren't my crape myrtles blooming? They bloomed well 3 or 4 years ago but haven't done much since. The foliage looks good. The blooms are suppose to be lavender. My yard is full of trees that are prospering.

A. The usual reason that crape myrtles do not bloom is because they are growing in the shade. They need full sun to bloom well. They also bloom on new growth so won't bloom if the plant is not producing growth because of shade, lack of nutrients and or lack of water. Sometimes gardeners prune of the new growth which also results in no blooms. If they are receiving plenty of sun, apply some slow-release lawn fertilizer and make sure they have received adequate water.

Q. My husband and I went on a one month trip for our anniversary. As a surprise present our son and daughter hired an itinerant tree pruner to prune our trees. He did not paint the pruning cuts on the oak trees. My neighbor is worried about oak wilt spreading from our trees to his and wants us to go ahead and hire someone to paint the cuts? I tried to convince him that after 5 days it is too late to paint wounds. I also referred him to the Texas Forest Service Oak Wilt website where it states that that the likelihood that the disease will begin during the hottest part of summer is very small. I am correct, aren't I?

A. Yes, you are correct on both counts. Most arborists and horticulturists recommend that wounds be painted within 5 days after the pruning cuts are made even in the summer but oak wilt is not likely to infect the tree through cuts in the hottest part of summer. Have a chat with your well-meaning children about using a certified arborist, and one that paints the wounds immediately after the pruning cuts are made.

Q. You often report that salvias, esperanza, and lantana are not eaten by the deer. They are eaten by our deer! They are savages.

A. During a hot dry spell like we are experiencing deer in some locations may be desperate. In addition to your report we received a report complete with photos of vinca that had been browsed by the deer. Newly placed plants are especially vulnerable. Spray them with Liquid Fence every week for a month to discourage curious hungry deer from tasting plants that they normally won't eat.

Q. We have had great luck planting the tomatoes you recommend but they aren't always easy to find in our area. What do you recommend in terms of obtaining varieties like HM 1826, BHN 968, Valley Cat, Red Deuce, Ruby Crush, and Roma Surprise? We can usually find Tycoon and Celebrity.

A. Suggest that your favorite retail nursery call around to their wholesalers to find the recommended varieties. If they can't find the specific varieties insist that they find you similar determinate, heat setting selections that can produce fruit quick enough to beat the heat in the spring and beat the cold weather in the fall. The old-fashioned indeterminate tomatoes can't compare for total production or quality in our climate and soils. It is time to plant the fall tomatoes now.

Q. When will the Monarch butterflies be through here again? Will we need the milkweed in place for them to lay their eggs? What other plants will attract them?

A. The Monarchs favor the milkweeds for nectar in the fall but they won't be laying eggs again until next spring when they return from the Mexican wintering ground. Plant milkweeds this fall (now) so they will be established and ready to produce flowers and foliage next spring. Nurseries seem to have the tropical milkweed and the butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). Other plants that Monarchs like for nectar are mistflower, porter weed, duranta, Mexican flame vine, and zinnias.