

## Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. What is a good choice for a blooming plant to grow in the shade? The bed is only 2 feet deep so it does not have to be very tall or wide. A perennial would be great but I guess I could plant annuals every spring and fall.

A. One choice would be blue plumbago. It blooms over a long season in the shade and the foliage makes it through most winters. It is not a disciplined grower and will send up limber stems to about 3 feet tall. Shrimp plant and Turks Cap would also be perennials that bloom in the shade. Shrimp plant is upright and you can choose between golden and rust colored flowers. It has a more disciplined growth habit than Turk's cap or blue plumbago. Turks cap has small red flowers and a sprawling growth habit. For annuals you could plant cyclamen for winter color and replace them with penta, "Whopper" begonia, or coleus in the summer.

Q. A raccoon is raising heck with our garden and household. She knocks down the bird feeders, eats the tomatoes in the garden, lives in the attic, and terrorizes our small dogs. What are my options?

A. You can enlist the help of a pest control company to first catch the troublemaker and then to block all entries into the attic. Raccoons are relatively easy to trap with a live trap and bait if you decide to do it yourself. If you are in a rural area you can destroy the raccoon. In an urban area you better check the local ordinances on disposing of the pest. The good news is that raccoons are very individualistic. If you trap this troublesome individual you may not ever have the same problem again if the other raccoons are less invasive. It is essential however that you block the entries into the attic.

Q. is it too late to plant milkweed for the Monarchs that will travel through Central Texas this fall? What else should we plant? My children are excited about helping restore the Monarch populations.

A. No, it is not too late. Some nurseries have tropical milkweed and the native milkweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*, in containers in full bloom. They can be planted now without destroying the bloom and the Monarchs that arrive in September and October will use them for nectar. The plants should also grow enough new foliage in the spring to serve as egg-laying sites for the Monarchs that arrive in the spring. The fall migrants will not be laying eggs. To supplement the milkweed plant mistflower, Mexican flame vine, porter weed, zinnias, and duranta.

Q. How likely is it that my fall tomatoes will be infected with spider mites? Will spraying the diluted seaweed extract under the leaves every week help. Is it worth the effort? What is the proper dilution?

A. If you carefully pulled and discarded any spring planted tomatoes that had spider mites or if your plants escaped being attacked by the pests, the chances are pretty good that they won't become a problem this fall. The quicker we experience cool weather the less likely that spider mites will become

an issue. The seaweed extract seems to work to slow down growth of the spider mite populations if you apply it thoroughly under the leaves every week. Even spraying clear water may help. I used 2 tablespoons of extract for every gallon of water.

Q. How long can my lawn survive without water? It is Bermuda grass and is brown already.

A. Bermuda grass, zoysia, and buffalo grass can survive a whole summer without water as long as they are planted on at least six inches of soil. Even St Augustine grass can survive if it receives water every 2 to 3 weeks. The results were determined in research conducted in San Antonio in 2003 and have been verified by lots of homeowners experiences since then.