

Gardening Q&A

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Q. Many my snapdragons have wilted and died. Is it because of the soil staying soggy due to the rainy days?

A. Yes, snapdragons are intolerant of soggy soils. I think of my raised bed soils as being well-drained but every year I lose some plants to the fungal root dieback that you describe. It is much less a problem in whiskey barrels and other containers where potting soil is used and there are lots of drain holes. You can address part of the problem if you add several inches of depth with compost to your bed.

Q. What is the best way to reduce the amount of bird seed and suet that squirrels eat at my feeders. I estimate that they eat three-quarters of the seed.

A. There are several tactics to consider: 1) Use steel Absolute feeders with weight sensitive perches. They shut the squirrels out. 2) Use less sunflower seed and more safflower seed. Squirrels do not like safflower seed, but birds do. 3) Feed peppered seed at your feeders. Wild bird specialty stores usually offer the see with pepper. 4) Trap the squirrels in a live trap and remove them. They are easy to catch with peanut butter as bait.

Q. What would make my poinsettias wilt? We water them every week. Are they done for?

A. Once/week watering may not be enough. The whole soil reservoir must be kept moist. Give them a soaking in the sink once/week but also add water or ice cubes every day. Other things that cause poinsettias to wilt are being subjected to cold winds, freezing temps, or hot drafts. Give them the soaking and see if they perk up. The modern selections have more ability to recover. If they don't recover in 3 or 4 days, I would delegate them to the compost pile.

Q. The Nursery has several varieties of onions from which to choose. Which selection is the best? I would guess that we should select the clumps that have the largest bulbs, am I right?

A. If I am an ambitious mood, I select a yellow onion (1015 or Legacy); a red onion, especially if it has some pungency (smell the clump), and a white slicing onion like Bermuda. If you don't have the space, select the reliable 1015. You are better off selecting the bundles that have the smaller onions because they are less likely to bolt (go to seed).

Q. Our lawn is turning brown and our neighbor's lawn is still green. Is it because his lawn is St Augustine and ours is Bermuda grass? Why would anyone choose Bermuda grass?

A. Yes, Bermuda more readily goes dormant in the winter. You would select Bermuda grass because it is more drought tolerant, has less problem with diseases, and has more traffic tolerance. St Augustine stays green longer in the winter and has more shade tolerance but is more of a challenge to care for.