

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. My 8-year-old Magnolia blooms well but it has very few leaves and does not grow larger. What can I do to make it grow larger?

A. There are lots of questions to ask before your question can be addressed. There are several different magnolia varieties, and some do not get very large. The fact that it seems to bloom well and has lived for 8 years makes me suspicious that it may be one of the smaller varieties. In general, Magnolias prefer acid soil to alkaline soil. Your tree might be struggling with the soil situation. Provide a moderate amount of Iron Plus fertilizer to the soil under the drip line every year at about this time of the year. Is the soil over the root system mulched? Six inches of mulch will help the tree prosper. You can also add some soil sulfur every year as per the product's label instructions.

Q. We want 12 months of color in our landscape. Now is one of the most difficult times to achieve our goal. What could we have in our landscape that would be blooming now?

A. The easiest plants to have in place that bloom now are the winter annuals- pansies, cyclamen, primula, stocks, dianthus, and alyssum. For perennials grow clumps of paperwhites. The primrose jasmine has also started to bloom. Some years cemetery iris begins blooming in January. All three of those plants are also deer proof. Texas and Oklahoma redbud are trees that are producing blooms now.

Q. Our roses are a tangled mess of thorny stems. Is now the time to prune them? Where is the best place to go for instructions on rose pruning? Is there a source of diagrams?

A. Valentines day is a good target date for pruning roses except for the climbing roses. Most gardeners wait until after the spring flush of blooms to prune the climbing roses, late May. Visit plantanswers.com for instructions and diagrams for pruning roses. It is also time to prune fruit trees and plantanswers.com has information on pruning fruit trees.

Q. We want to make some major improvements to our landscape, but the task seems overwhelming. What are your recommendations to prepare ourselves to complete the planning and work?

A. One option is to enlist the help of a landscape designer. You also may want to consider a resource such as the book, "Home Landscaping, Texas" by Greg Grant and Roger Holmes. In San Antonio, the Gardening Volunteers of South Texas (GVST) offer a half day Landscape School every quarter. Visit their website at gardeningvolunteers.org to see when the next class is scheduled. The South Texas Home, Garden, and Environmental Show in Floresville has a Landscape Class scheduled on Sunday March 4 from 9AM until 2PM. There is a \$25 fee per individual or \$40 for two members of a household. Call 1-830- 393 7357 to reserve a seat.

Q. Our crepe myrtles did well in 2016 but last year they had an infestation of small insects followed by black leaves. There were no blooms. What is the problem and how should we deal with it?

A. The description sounds like the plants were infested with aphids, which excreted honeydew, on which, sooty mold grew. This year watch for the reappearance of the aphids and quickly spray them with malathion or a spinosad product before the sooty mold forms. Fertilize the crape myrtles in March with slow-release lawn fertilizer to encourage more growth.