

## Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Concerning purple martins, when is the last day we can normally expect new arrivals? I have pairs in one of my 3 houses and want to take the other 2 down if we can't expect other martins to show up. We don't need to provide additional housing for English sparrows.

A. I have had new breeding birds show up as late as early April. Mid – April might be a good deadline date. If you notice new birds showing up after that you can always put your other houses back up.

Q. What is your opinion of a mulching lawn mower? We need a new mower for this spring and our dealer has a good price on a mulching mower.

A. I like mulching mowers. They double-cut the grass so have less flexibility to tackle overgrown or wet areas. That means you will be more likely to be bogged down if you don't mow frequently enough or you try to mow before the grass is dry. You would be more likely have to mow high first and then move the blade level down for a second mowing.

Q. How do we treat fire ants in container plants? It seems like every one of our flower pots and citrus barrels is infested with fire ants.

A. Yes, they love the well-drained condition of most containers. Use an acephate based treatment like "Surrender" to treat non-food plants. Sprinkle one to 3 tablespoons of the white powder spread over the active mound. For food plants (citrus, vegetables, etc.) use one of the fire ant controls with spinosad as an active ingredient. Follow the label instructions. In addition, you may want to spread a bait such as Amdro over the entire yard. It works slowly (2-3 weeks) for a control but is effective in eliminating mounds over the whole yard.

Q. Will our sweet peas ever bloom? They finally are producing some foliage but no blooms yet. Should we fertilize them?

A. the sweet peas were set back this year because of the cold weather in January but seem to finally are recovering. I saw the first blooms in a garden last week. Be patient, all the sweet peas that are growing in full sun should begin blooming in March. Yes, sweet peas respond well to light applications of slow release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) or soluble fertilizers applied after being dissolved in water in a sprinkler can.

Q. We potted up our tomatoes but now they are so large that it looks like they want to bloom. Can we plant them in the garden yet?

A. Yes, we pot up tomato transplants when the soil is too cool to allow them to prosper. It is a problem however if they out grow their pots to the point of blooming. Apply 10 cups of slow-release lawn fertilizer per 100 sq. ft of bed and go ahead and plant them in the raised bed. Usually the soil is warm enough after March 15.