

## Sandefer Gardening Q&A

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Q. We have two walnut trees that are declining quickly in the hot dry weather. The leaves are falling off and no amount of supplemental water seems to stop the decline. They are about 3 years old and were planted at the same time as a bur oak, pin oak, and Arizona ash, all of which are doing fine. What do you think the issue is?

A. Arizona walnut is native to parts of Central and West Texas, but it is sensitive to drought and survives best in streambed soils. It also seems to grow best in areas with some elevation. Desert plants tolerate high daytime temperatures but prosper best in areas with cooler nighttime temperatures. Walnuts are also inclined to drop their leaves early in droughts. Water the walnuts deeply by letting the hose run for an hour every week on the drip line during the rest of the summer. You mentioned a pin oak that is growing well. Pin oaks are a species that require acid soil so don't be surprised if it declines within a few years.

Q. Our Texas mountain laurel foliage is getting eaten by a small caterpillar. What can we spray to control the damage?

A. The caterpillars and damage are common. I have forgotten the real name, but I call them sophora caterpillars. Spray a Bt product such as Thuricide, Bio-Worm Control or Dipel on the area where the caterpillars are feeding. They will quit feeding almost immediately and the foliage will regrow.

Q. You and Dr Parsons on your radio show Gardening South Texas have talked about the number of species of birds that visit your bird baths every day for as long as I can remember. This summer my husband and I bought two birdbaths in preparation for a visit from our grandchildren. The birdbaths and the birds they attracted were the hit of the visit. We recorded 11 species – white-winged doves, Inca doves, cardinals, blue jays, lesser goldfinches, house finches, black-chinned hummingbirds, English sparrows, golden-fronted woodpeckers, and grackles. The most exciting visitor was a young Cooper's hawk! Thanks for the encouragement.

A. Thanks for the report. You will probably reach at least 20 species if the dry weather continues into the migration period!

Q. I am disappointed in my "whopper" begonias. After a good performance through mid-summer they are now scraggly and unattractive. I am thinking I should have cut them back earlier than I did so that they did not have to face the windy rain spells and squirrel traffic as large unwieldy plants. With the heat they are not putting on new foliage.

A. Don't give up on them. I think when the night time temps cool later this month they will produce some new foliage. To keep them neat until then you may want to do some more pruning. Experiment with the degree of pruning that works best.

Q. Which of the fall vegetables do best in containers? I want an attractive and productive planting.

A. Look for Ruby Crush, BHN 968 cherry tomatoes and pepper transplants in 1-gallon containers. Lettuce does well. You can plant several colors together. Carrots and beets are attractive and produce a good crop. The Bright Lights Swiss chard is a showy plant that can be harvested leaf by leaf throughout the winter. Kale is also a productive, attractive container vegetable.