

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. We have a large yard with a few large oaks and a cedar elm. We want to plant a conifer. We tried an Afghan pine a few years ago but it died from a fungal disease just like most of the Afghan pines in the area. Is there a conifer that looks as good as an Afghan pine that will survive our soils and weather?

A. The 3 pines that seem to prosper in our soil and weather are Aleppo pine, Italian stone pine, and black Japanese pine. I don't think any of them is as attractive as an Afghan pine. My recommendation would be to plant an Arizona cypress. It has a classic conifer shape and is very pest and drought tolerant. Arizona cypress is relatively slow growing. For a larger fast growing conifer some gardeners are planting Montezuma cypress. It is related to a bald cypress but is better adapted to upland planting sites.

Q. With the rain I have not been able to mow my lawn and now it is so tall and thick with weeds my mower can't handle it. What is your recommendation to let me get back in charge of my lawn?

A. The problem you describe is an issue that many homeowners have had to face this month. It is especially challenging if you have a mulching mower. Some of the options that exist are to raise your mower height and skim off the top before tackling the rest of the height. If it is especially thick you may have to rake off the first cutting. Other options include hiring a mowing by someone with a larger mower or bush-hog. Using a string mower for the initial cutting may also work.

Q. We really like the "Whopper" begonia for a summer color plant but the heavy rains tore the plants apart. There are stems and ragged leaves. Will they recover or should we just pull them up?

A. I am not sure what to recommend. If you prune them back they may produce a new set of leaves. If it is a mild winter they may repair themselves, survive and be decorative. If they are in the shade and you normally replace them with cyclamen or primula for the winter you can pull the "Whoppers" but will have to wait until November to plant the new species. How about planting garden mums in bloom for October and then use the cyclamen. Mums are sun plants but if they have started to bloom they will do a good job in shade for temporary color.

Q. We want to feed the birds this winter. When is a good time to start? What should we feed?

A. I begin my winter bird feeding on or about October 1. I use a steel feeder with a weight sensitive perch to feed black oil sunflower seed. The steel and weight sensitive perch allows me to limit access to the feed for squirrels and white-winged doves. Thistle feed in a tube feeder specially designed with small openings works well to distribute feed to goldfinches. Use a platform feeder to distribute mixed seed to Inca doves and American sparrows.

Q. It turns out we have cutworms in addition to cabbage loopers eating the foliage from our broccoli and greens transplants in the vegetable garden. The Bt works for the loopers but not the cutworms. Is there a more reliable control?

A Yes, spray the soil at the base of the plants and the plants with malathion or Sevin to reliably control cutworms. Sevin is still available at some retailers.