

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. What caused the huge drop of ball moss from the trees in our area? Is it ravished by a disease, I hope! Are the plants poisonous? Should we clean them up to protect the deer and our pets?

A. The ball moss drop was caused by the heavy winds we had on 12-14 and 15. Ball moss is not a parasite and does not penetrate its host plant, so it is vulnerable to winds and/or heavy rains. No, ball moss is not a threat to pets or deer. It is an epiphyte (air plant) unique to Central Texas. Epiphytes make their living from the air and don't hurt the trees on which they grow.

Q. Several years ago we planted Spring Bouquet Viburnum. It bloomed every spring and was attractive but now it has yellow leaves and is not a compact attractive shrub. Do you have any ideas about its new identity and performance?

A. Have you been fertilizing the plant? Prune back some of the unruly stems to form a compact top and fertilize with Iron Plus. With that treatment it should green-up and form a more attractive plant that will bloom in the spring.

Q. We just finished some construction work on our house and the lawn is a mess from the trucks and work. What is the best way to deal with the soil compaction? Is there some soil additive that will give the grass a chance?

A. The best treatment is to aerate the lawn and apply one half inch of compost for top dressing. Some lawn care companies will do the job for a reasonable fee or you can rent an aerator from Home Depot or a hort supply company. The best aerators cut a plug of soil from the sod and lay it on the surface. They compost can then penetrate the root area.

Q. What is the trick to producing onions with large bulbs? I see the plants are available at the nursery now. In past years they either went to seed for me or never put any size on.

A. Plant the onions in a row in full sun after adding 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow release lawn fertilizer to every 100 sq. ft of bed. Fertilization is one of the key contributors to successful onion production so be prepared to add more fertilizer to the row every 3 weeks. To give the onions the space they need you can plant them 6 inches apart in the row or be prepared to harvest green onions from the row to get to the 6-inch spacing by March 15.

Q. What are the fragrant flowers that can be planted in the winter for cut flowers?

A. Stocks and sweet peas are wonderfully fragrant and make good cut flowers. Allyssum is another winter annual with a pleasant fragrance but does not work for a cutting flower.