

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. I planted wild cherry seeds in a container with the idea that I will transplant them into the soil. How will they do in our soil and climate?

A. Where did the seed come from? Is it wild black cherry, *Prunus serotina* from a local seed source? According to the book "Texas Trees, A Friendly Guide" by Paul Cox and Pattie Leslie, 3 versions of the species grow in 3 different parts of Texas. Our closest version, the escarpment cherry, grows in Central Texas in streambeds, slopes, canyons and forested areas such as Lost Maples State Park. There do not seem to be very many growing in level caliche or blacklands soils. Try it but don't rely on the species as your only shade tree.

Q. You have mentioned cutworms several times in your articles, but I can't remember how to control them. They are devouring our beet, chard, and spinach seedlings.

A. Try spraying Sevin or malathion along the row where you have planted the vegetable seeds. Also spray a week later when the seedlings emerge. Sevin is no longer manufactured for home gardeners but nurseries can distribute the containers on hand.

Q. We are harvesting our Bloomsweet grapefruit. It tastes great, but it has lots of seed and some of the pieces of fruit have black speckles that look like fungus. Any idea what causes the black speckles? Is it a disease? Will there be less seed as the tree matures?

A. The Bloomsweet is an excellent choice for a backyard fruit tree. They are productive, produce a tasty fruit, and are relatively cold tolerant. Unfortunately, they do have lots of seed. There is no way to reduce the seed production. The black specks are caused by young grackles that peck out pieces of the peeling. Nobody is sure yet why they do the pecking, but they appear to rub the peeling on their feathers. In addition to grapefruit they do the same pecking to satsumas, lemons, oranges and other citrus.

Q. We built a simple tent cover for our tomatoes and used poultry lamps for heat sources with the results that the plants and fruit escaped the November freeze. The fruit is large now but is not showing any color. What can we do to make it ripen?

A. That is often an issue for fall tomatoes. If temperatures are cool like they have been, they don't receive enough heat units to turn red. Pick a few to experiment but I believe if you pick the full-size fruit and place it in the house on the kitchen counter, it will quickly turn orange and be ready to use.

Q. Should we fertilize our cyclamen? They look great, but I realized they are the only plants in the winter garden where I have no fertilization plan. Will they do better with fertilizer?

A. Yes, cyclamen respond well to a fertilization program just like the other winter flowers and vegetables. If they are growing in a container, they should have received a generous application of Osmocote at planting. If they are in a flower bed the initial fertilization can be by way of slow-release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9). Every month after planting, apply some soluble fertilizer like Peters or Miracle-gro dissolved in water to both the container grown and soil grown.