

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. Our red tip photinias are getting more and more decimated by the fungal leaf diseases that plague them. We tried fungal sprays and even collected all the infected leaves last year without stopping the decline. We have decided to give up the battle and go ahead and replace them. Last year you had some recommendations for a replacement shrub. The hedge is in full sun and it would be best if it was 8 feet tall.

A. Standard Burford holly would meet those requirements. It is evergreen, reaches 8 feet tall and is drought tolerant after it becomes established. The winter berries are decorative and will be eaten by the birds in late winter. The plant is a disciplined grower so does not require much pruning. Burford hollies are also relatively disease and pest free. Plant them 6 feet apart for a dense hedge.

Q. What do you recommend doing in a bird-feeding effort to reduce the dominance by squirrels? I feel like they eat over half of our sunflower seeds!

A. There are several tactics to consider. I use the metal Absolute feeders with weight sensitive perches for the sunflower seeds. You can also feed more safflower seed and less sunflower seed. The birds like safflower seed but the squirrels don't. Another effective strategy is to use pepper flavored seed and suet. Birds don't taste the pepper, but the squirrels do and do not like it. The pepper flavored seeds and suet even seems to discourage the raccoons.

Q. Our Florida King peaches seem to have made it through the latest freeze. What should we be spraying them with to ward off diseases and insects? We had problems with stink bugs last year.

A. I recommend that you alternate between spraying with Sevin and malathion each week for insects. The two products can handle stink bugs. Sevin is not being manufactured anymore but some nurseries still have it available for sale. Use Captan to protect against funguses. Organic gardeners can try sprays with pyrethrin and neem oil or sulfur as the active ingredients. Follow label instructions.

Q. I see that the nursery is already selling zinnia transplants. We like zinnias for cut flowers and as a nectar source for butterflies. Do you recommend we pull the snapdragons in the flower garden to make room for zinnias?

A. I also like zinnias, but the snapdragons probably still have a month and a half of good blooming left. Leave the snaps that look good and gradually replace them with zinnias.

Q. Our lawn has looked great all winter but now it is showing some coarseness and fading. Should we fertilize it?

A. No, it is too early to fertilize the lawn. What you are probably seeing is the decline of the rescue grass that prospered in the lawn area all winter. It is a cool weather weed that declines when warm weather arrives. Your permanent lawn grass (zoysia, St Augustine, or Bermuda grass) will begin growing now. Fertilize the lawn with slow-release lawn fertilizer after you mow real grass (not weeds) twice, usually in late April.