

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. There is a leggy shrub that resembles a redbud growing in the corner of the yard. The blooms are the same color as redbud but aren't blooming tight against the stem. The leaves are also small and not heart-shaped. The most distinctive characteristic is the 3podded seeds. Do you recognize it?

A. It sounds like you are describing a Mexican buckeye. They grow on the edge of taller trees and are blooming now. They are a desirable understory tree that is more shrubby than redbud. They often develop as a thicket.

Q. After a large number of years of great performance, our Asiatic jasmine seems to be declining at one end of the bed. We have tried adding some new soil, but it still is dying back. Is it a fungus or other disease?

A. Asiatic jasmine is very hardy and long-lived but can decline for several reasons. How tall are you mowing it? If it is less than 6 inches, try letting it grow taller. Has a work crew or landscape team spilled herbicides, gasoline or another toxic chemical in the area? How about drainage? Is the soil compacted or is water accumulating in a low spot?

Do some exploring with your hand shovel to look for any of the characteristics described. Aerate for compaction and address any drainage problem. New soil may be needed if there is spill. To address a fungal dieback, apply a soil fungicide labeled for the lawn and groundcovers. The problem could be a combination of 2 or more causes. Poor drainage may cause a fungal root rot.

Q. How often should we have to water our cyclamen? The flowers brown but perk up when we water again.

A. Cyclamen are not xeriscape plants. They like cool weather and shade. Their root systems are not far-ranging, and the flowers are the first part of the plant to decline if the limited root system dries out. As the weather warms up it is common to have to water them 2 or 3 times a week.

Q. You talk about mulching tomatoes and other plants with live oak leaves. Now I hear that it is best to wait a month to mulch because the leaves will insulate the soil and keep it cool, which is not good for the tomato growth rate. What is best?

A. We think of mulches as reducing evaporation and preserving soil moisture, but what you heard is true. The mulch will keep soil from warming up. Pile your live oak leaves near the tomato plants in the garden and only spread it on the row after our temperatures increase. Go ahead and use it for your paths in the garden and for mulching established plants.

Q. I know it is time to grow green beans by seed. We are growing them for the first time. Should we plant the bush version or the vining version?

A. Both options work well but I recommend the bush version because they produce a crop faster and require less space. The vining varieties do produce more beans over a longer season though.