

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. Is it advisable to quit feeding the birds now as we move into summer? It seems like they shouldn't need food support in the summertime.

A. The main reason many of us feed the birds is to bring them into range for easy observation. That is easier to do in the winter than the summer.

Some naturalists credit bird feeding with a role in supporting higher numbers of a species. I hear it quite often concerning the white winged dove populations in San Antonio. Reasons to reduce bird feeding in the summer include cutting off a food supply to rodents and reducing the cost of bird feeding. It does seem desirable to plant food sources in the summer landscape. Is it just as easy to observe lesser goldfinches and cardinals in a sunflower or zinnia patch than at a thistle feeder? How about humming birds at sugar water feeders as opposed to the flower garden? One great summer option is providing water with bird baths. There is little cost, little impact on rodents, and lots of response from the birds. Consider the options and the reasons to change your bird feeding for the summer.

Q. There are worms hanging on web like threads from our live oak tree, I don't see that they are doing much damage to the foliage but is there any action that we should take?

A. There are several caterpillars that will feed on the new live oak leaves and part of their behavior is to hang from the trees. As you noticed in your examination of the feeding results, the damage is minor. We generally ignore the caterpillars but on younger trees you could control the worms with Bt or another insecticide.

Q. We missed the warnings extended by area horticulturists that it was not recommended to use a Weed and Feed product to treat our lawn here in Central Texas. Is there anything we need to do to reverse any problems created by our action?

A. The reason that the use of Weed and Feed is not recommended is that the timing is wrong to apply a fertilizer and herbicide at the same time. It is now time to fertilize the lawn but a pre-emergent and or contact herbicide to be effective should have been applied by March 1. The Weed and Feed products waste chemicals at best. and pose an environmental threat at worse when applied together. There is no effective way to neutralize the application. It should not be a major problem unless the herbicide was applied in a part of the landscape that is sensitive to the active ingredient.

Q. Can any of the blooming plants be used in beds that are open to deer?

A. Vinca is a summer annual that prospers in the full sun and is not eaten by deer. In some situations, deer also ignore zinnias. The perennials salvia, lantana, four-o'clock, esperanza, milkweed, thyrallis, and iris also seem to be deer-proof. In some neighborhoods the deer don't eat poinciana. For new plantings

it often works best to go ahead and apply a product like Liquid Fence every week for a month to discourage the deer from testing the taste of the new plants.