

Gardening Q&A

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Q. What are the long-legged ugly bugs that are mobbing my tomatoes? I am not sure what damage they are doing because the birds are so active. What are they and what should we do about them, if anything?

A. They are leaf-footed bugs, part of the stink bug family. They inject digestive juices into the fruit and then harvest the stew that is created. They leave some scar tissue and some bitterness. Leaf-footed bugs and stink bugs are not easy to control. A Sevin or malathion spray seems to work best. Some gardeners use a vacuum cleaner to collect them! Use bird netting if you want to reduce the bird damage. Follow label instructions on use of the insecticides.

Q. I have four-o'clocks growing as weeds in my shrub border. I notice that along with Texas mountain laurel, iris, esperanza and thyralis that the deer do not eat them. The four-o'clocks have colorful bloom and attractive foliage. Why don't we grow them for the flowers?

A. Some gardeners do! They are not disciplined plants and produce large deep roots, so they are relatively hard to manage. You are right though; the deer don't eat them, and they produce colorful flowers. Four-o'clocks are also drought tolerant. Trade pieces of root to get new colors for you planting from other gardeners.

Q. The well-timed rains this winter and spring have resulted in lush growth of weeds. I have noticed as I fight the weeds, that there are also lots of slugs and snails hiding in every crevice and pile of foliage. They are feeding heavily on my zinnias that I plant for the butterflies. If I used a Carbaryl based slug and snail bait will it hurt the butterflies or their caterpillars? It is the active ingredient that works the best for me.

A. Slug and Snail Bait with carbaryl should not hurt the butterflies or their caterpillars. The granules are consumed by the slugs and snails on the ground and do not seem to attract nectar seeking butterflies or foliage eating caterpillars.

Q. What is the key getting bougainvillea to bloom? We gave two plants to my Mother for Mother's Day, but they are not performing very well. They were in bloom when we bought them but nothing now? They are in full sun and we keep them well watered. What kind of fertilizer is required?

A. Full sun is a necessity. Fertilize with Osmocote or hibiscus food according to the label instructions. Did you transplant them to larger containers? Bougainvillea bloom best when they are root bound My guess, however, is that the plants are being over watered. To bloom well bougainvillea must be allowed to dry out between watering. Some gardeners even allow them to wilt before they are re-watered.

Q. We planted tatum squash to replace summer squash because of the squash vine borers. Tatum is an aggressive grower. How large should the fruit be when they are harvested?

A. The tatum squash will grow quickly to volleyball size. One can be grown that large for next year's seed but for eating in squash recipes harvest the fruit at softball size.