

Gardening Q&A

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Q. My St Augustine lawn has been beautiful for years growing under our oak trees, but it has declined over the last few years. It may be because of climate change and global warming but whatever the cause, my spouse and I think it is time that we replace the St Augustine grass with a grass variety that is more drought tolerant. What are our choices?

A. Bermuda grass and zoysia grass are both more drought tolerant than St Augustine grass but neither has as much shade tolerance. Based on the usual decline of lawn grasses growing under shade trees for years, I would guess that the problem is too much shade rather than other weather conditions. It is desirable to seek a more drought tolerant lawn, but I believe you will have to consider one of the shade tolerant groundcovers such as sedge, dwarf ruellia, Asiatic jasmine, English ivy, mondo grass, or liriop rather than a different grass.

Q. What peach varieties do you recommend for backyard trees in our area? What are the tricks to follow in successfully growing them?

A. My favorite varieties are Florida King, Junegold, and La Feliciana. If your soil is caliche or blacklands clay grow them on raised beds irrigated by drip irrigation. If your soil is sand, enrich the soil with compost and again irrigate with drip irrigation.

Q. Is it time to plant wildflower seed? Are there any wildflowers that grow in the shade?

A. Yes, it is time to spread wildflower seed on sites that include bare soil where the seed can make soil contact. Most wildflowers require sun to prosper but blue curl and *Salvia coccinea* are both varieties that will grow in the shade. Blue curl blooms early in the spring and is a favorite nectar source for butterflies. *Salvia coccinea* blooms over a long season including the autumn. It is a favorite nectar source for hummingbirds.

Q. We have planted broccoli in our winter vegetable garden. They are being fed upon by caterpillars. We are trying to handpick them off the plants, but we are only partially successful. Are there any other control tactics that won't kill the other butterflies in the landscape?

A. The most effective way to control cabbage loopers is to spray the foliage on which they are feeding with the organic insecticide Bt. Bt only affects caterpillars that feed on foliage where it has been sprayed. It does not hurt butterflies or caterpillars in the rest of the landscape. Products that use Bt as an active ingredient include Dipel, BioWorm Killer, and Monterey Bt.

Q. Is it time to fertilize our lawn for the fall?

A. The best target date is October 1. Use a product identified as a winterizer with a 3-1-2 nutrient ratio. The product with 18-6-12 is an example.