

Gardening Q&A

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Q. What is the best size shade tree to plant? You didn't make that recommendation in the "Shade Tree Recommendation" article that I found in the archives of plantanswers.com. We have blacklands clay soil.

A. You have more flexibility concerning which size to plant if you are in sand, blacklands clay or even caliche if it is deep enough to cover the root ball of the tree you decide to plant. Even with relatively deep soil, I prefer to plant a 10- or 15-gallon plant. The 10- and 15-gallon root balls are relatively easy to dig a hole for, the tree is big enough to make an impression, and they are quick to begin growth because the root system can often support the top after a minimal adjustment period.

If you don't have the soil depth available to cover the root ball, dig it as deep as possible and then mound up the soil to the top of the root ball. One of the key issues is to soak the root ball every time the soil dries to one inch. Do not mound soil over the root ball on to the trunk.

Q. If we plant zinnia seed now is there time to harvest the blooms before the freeze arrives? We like the zinnias as cut flowers, and it is the best nectar source for the butterflies in our yard.

A. I have zinnias that have just started to bloom and some reseeded plants that are a few inches tall. Normally we expect them to escape the freezing weather until Thanksgiving but last year we had a record freeze on November 14. I am going to enjoy the blooming plants along with the butterflies as long as possible, but I don't expect any new plants or newly seeded plants to last long enough to bloom.

Plant stock, calendula, and snapdragons for cut flowers in the wintertime. Sweet peas are also great to grow and are appreciated by the butterflies.

Q. We have always liked greens to eat but never tried to grow them. What are our options now that we have some garden space? We have heard a lot about kale.

A. Kale is identified by nutritionists as one of the best greens to grow for vitamins, minerals and fiber. It is also easy to grow, and you can choose between several attractive varieties at the nursery. I like the taste of Swiss chard and collards better than kale but all of them can be mixed for tasty nutritious dishes. Later in November spinach transplants can also be planted.

Q. Our St Augustine lawn has lots of dead areas. It was diagnosed as brown patch by our neighbor who has a great lawn. He said to apply a soil fungicide like F-Stop and stop watering it! He also said it would be a waste of fertilizer to apply "winterizer" when it is in this condition. Is he correct?

A. Your neighbor's treatment plan sounds good to me. Brown patch starts in low spots in the lawn that stay wet, you may want to raise the grade on those low areas by one inch or more with a soil mix from a

horticultural supply company. Next fall cut back on irrigation as soon as the nights cool. To do its job fertilizer must be applied to green grass with functioning roots and grass blades.

Q. What are the best peach trees for our area?

A. I recommend Florida King, June Gold, and La Feliciano