

Gardening Q&A

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Q. The leaves of 3 of 8 oaks suddenly turned brown in November. All of them are 10 years old. Do have any idea about the cause and how we should treat them.

A. From your photo it looks like the trees are live oaks. A number of trees around the area lost their leaves and some died after the record summer heat and limited moisture. Trees that are on shallow, poor soils are especially vulnerable. If the trees are live oaks, I would be nervous about their future if they did not releaf this fall. If the trees are competing with each other for limited soil and moisture, some may not survive. I recommend you ask your County Agricultural Extension Agent or an Arborist to examine the trees to make a diagnosis.

Q. We have an Arctic Frost satsuma that bore fruit for the first time this year. The fruit was small, and they were disappointedly sour when we tried them in November and even early December. Now, however they taste great. Is it normal for them to take this long to become sweet? What about the thorns, is that an indicator of a problem?

A. The first year of production of fruit trees is often unpredictable. In my experience Arctic Frost is especially hard to predict. On most citrus, thorns on all or part of the plant indicates juvenility, however, thorns on the mature Arctic Frost are not unusual. You also have the added factor of the hot dry summer to influence the fruit production. Enjoy the fruit now and see what happens next year. I predict it will produce some larger fruit that ripens earlier in the year.

Q. We only have room for one feeder by my disabled Mother's room window. What kind of seed would stimulate the most action in terms of species and individual birds?

A. Sunflower seed is the most popular seed. Offer it in a steel feeder with a weight sensitive perch to reduce squirrel dominance. Teamed with a pepper flavored suet block, there would be lots of action. Some sunflower seed feeders have a suet feeder attached.

Q. We have a bit of a debate about mowing the lawn in the winter. My husband has heard that we should mow higher than the summer height. I like a lower mowing height. Which is best?

A. I recommend that the lawn be mowed at the same height in the winter as the summer. In terms of lawn health, it really does not make much difference. You can adjust one way or the other to meet your preferences.

Q. How long should the cyclamen last? We are starting to lose some in our bed by the front door. Is there any defensive action we can take to extend their bloom life?

A. Cyclamen decline for a number of reasons. It is common for squirrels and other animals to dig in the containers and break down the central stalk. If they receive more than a few hours of sun they can wilt especially as the temperatures increase. Make sure they are watered at the base if they wilt but the soil also has to drain so that the base does not rot.