

## Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. How can we deal with fire ants in the vegetable garden? I normally use acephate and Amdro, but the labels of both products forbid use of the products in the vegetable garden!

A. Good work for reading the label closely. Use the Amdro bait close to but outside the garden in compliance with the label. The product will be carried to mounds in the area. For a direct mound treatment look for one of the fire ant control treatments that use Spinosad as the active ingredient. Verify that the label confirms it can be applied to mounds in the vegetable garden. Use of the two products will control fire ants in and around the vegetable garden.

Q. I feel so helpless and it is depressing that my newly arrived purple martins must do battle with the English sparrows and starlings to take possession of the houses that I put up for them to use. It seems unpleasant but does it work to get a pellet gun to rout some of the sparrows and starlings? What are some other options?

A. Some gardeners use pellet guns, but I don't find it effective because of the amount of time you must dedicate to guard duty and you must also be a good shot. The martins usually don't get bothered by lowering the house to remove sparrow nests especially if you only do it once or twice in the early days of the competition and your house is easy to lower and raise. In the end hopefully the sparrows and the martins will share the house.

Q. We purchased a new home that we now find out is in the middle of a herd of deer. What are some shrubs we can plant? Are there any flowers that will survive?

A. In terms of flowers iris, paperwhites, Mexican honeysuckle, lantanas, and salvias all survive amid the deer. For shrubs consider viburnum, Texas mountain laurel, esperanza, yaupon holly, thyralis, pomegranate, and primrose jasmine. It is always a good idea to spray new plantings (even supposedly deer proof plants) with a product like Liquid Fence to discourage taste tests by the deer. For more plants to consider visit [plantanswers.com](http://plantanswers.com).

Q. What is a good fertilizer to use in our flower and vegetable gardens?

A. For an all-around fertilizer use a slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 now. Prepare beds for new plantings with 10 cups of the product incorporated into every 100 sq. ft of bed. It is good to use as a lawn fertilizer after you mow real grass (not weeds) twice, usually about May 1.

Q. Is there any herbicide that will work to control rain lilies?

A. Rain lilies are tough to control. You can try applying a contact herbicide such as Round-up on the foliage. The easiest route is to learn to appreciate them. They bloom attractively for short periods after rains and are used by butterflies for a nectar source. I don't think they detract from the lawn.