

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. We put up a purple martin house for the first time this year and there are at least 4 martins that want to use it, but they are being attacked by the English sparrows. What can we do to help them take possession of the house?

A. If the house is easy to raise and lower you can lower it once or twice in the afternoon to pull the sparrow nests out. The other option is to let the battles run their course. Based on my experiences the martins and sparrows will end up sharing the house and ignoring each other.

Q. Cucumber beetles are eating the blooms on our peach trees and the foliage on our newly planted pepper plants. Is that a problem? How do we control them?

A. Any insecticide will kill cucumber beetles. I recommend Spinosad or Sevin spray on the peppers. There is always a debate whether the beetles eating the bloom petals will reduce fruit set on the peaches. Reducing fruit set on a tree overloaded with fruit is not all bad. Are the bees and other pollinators visible on the peach blooms? At some point you will want to start your spray program on the peaches. Use Malathion with Captan. Spray in the evening to control the cucumber beetles, stinkbugs, and curculios with minimum effect on the bees.

Q. With the hot weather our cyclamen and primula plantings in the shade are declining quickly. They get some sun. What are the options to replace them in the summertime?

A. Semperfloren begonias work very well. There are 4 flower colors and 2 foliage colors. Also consider the Whopper begonia which is a large version of the semperfloren. The begonias can tolerate a little sun and are more drought tolerant than the cyclamen. Coleus and caladiums are colorful foliage plants for the summer shade garden.

Q. Our landscape maintenance contractor disagrees with you about waiting to apply lawn fertilizer until you have mowed real grass twice! He says that only one half of the nitrogen is released now so most will be available to the lawn grass even if it is applied now. What do you think?

A. Some years the waste and environmental threat of placing nitrogen on the lawn early will be minimal but why not make sure that it is efficient every year? Based on available research the nitrogen is best utilized if the grass is actively growing with a widespread root system capable collecting the nutrients and green foliage that conducts the translocation of moisture and nutrients from the roots through the plant.

Q. Is it still a good time to plant new shade trees? What are the best choices?

A. The fall is the best time but now is still a good time. Among the recommended species are live oak, cedar elm, Texas Red oak, Mexican sycamore, bur oak, Mexican white oak, and chinkapin oak.