

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. If we put the weeds we pull like bedstraw, beggar's lice, and thistle into the compost pile wont that just distribute the seed into the gardens when we distribute the compost?

A. Some will, we have all seen tomato plants and other veggies that germinate from discarded fruit near the compost pile. Usually not, however, especially if you pull the weeds before they produce seed. Even if the pulled plants have seed heads most of the seeds decompose in the composting process. The seeds that don't decompose because they end up around the edge of the pile are usually a minor source of weed seeds when compared to the seeds distributed by weeds around the landscape.

Q. After the initial freeze this winter my lawn greened up and looked great. I kept it mowed. Now however it is fading. Should I have fertilized? What do you think is causing the decline?

A. I believe you enjoyed a lawn this winter of rescue grass or annual bluegrass. Dr Parsons and I call it the sustainable winter lawn on our radio show. The usual situation where one or other of the weeds prosper in the winter is in situations where the lawn is shaded, the soil is shallow, and the summer lawn is not irrigated. Now the two grassy weeds are declining in the spring warm-up. Your permanent lawn grass, usually St Augustine, will green-up. Fertilize your real grass about May 1.

Q. I want to plant a peach tree this spring. What variety do you recommend? We don't need two varieties for pollination, right?

A. My favorite variety is Florida King. It is a reliable producer of semi- cling peaches early in the season that does not require much winter cold. La Feliciana produces its freestone fruit later in the season and is also a good low-chill choice. Something special to try is Red Baron. It is a low chill peach that matures in mid-summer after a long show of spectacular red blooms.

Q. What can I do to control fire ants in the vegetable garden and containers?

A. For general control of fire ants spread a bait such as Amdro around the yard as per label instructions. For direct treatment of mounds in the garden use a product with Spinosad as the active ingredient. Verify that the label allows use in the garden. The Spinosad product can also be used for containers. Acephate products can be used for control of ants in non-food growing containers.

Q. We want to be part of the initiative to increase monarch populations but are having trouble finding native milkweed to plant. What is your advice?

A. Keep watch at area native plant nurseries. Some may offer native milkweeds. Some of the internet nurseries have native milkweed seeds and plants to sell. Organizations like the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center have instructions on growing native milkweed from seed. In the meantime, grow tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*). It is an attractive plant available at area nurseries and the Monarchs favor it as an egg-laying site. *Asclepias tuberosa* will also be available at area nurseries. It is a native milkweed with attractive flowers that are a favorite nectar source but not utilized as an egg laying site.