

Gardening Q&A

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Q. We observed an area in our St Augustine lawn about 8 inches across that was covered with a bright yellow slime. It does not appear to have injured the grass yet. What is it and what should we do to protect the grass?

A. Your description of the symptom sounds like slime mold, a fungal disease that appears occasionally on lush St Augustine lawns after a wet period due to rain or irrigation. The fungus is unattractive, but it does not cause any long-term damage. You can wipe it off with a cloth.

Q. The okra we planted by seed 3 weeks ago never germinated. Is it too late to re seed?

A. Was the seed old? Okra seed is also sensitive to cool soil conditions. If the seed is several years old some will germinate but plant it thick. If the weather cooperates you should still harvest some okra.

Q. Our tomato plants are looking good, but they are not setting any fruit. How much sun is required? How much fertilizer?

A. Tomatoes do best in full sun, at least 8 hours of sun. Foliage will be produced in less sun but little fruit will set. The planting bed should have been fertilized with 10 cups of slow release lawn fertilizer per 100 sq. ft before planting and then side dress every plant with a half cup every 3 weeks. Are you using the recommended varieties? Some of the heirloom varieties just keep growing foliage until it gets too hot to set fruit.

Q. What flowers are recommended for planting in the shade for summer color?

A. The top choice is probably the semperfloren begonia. It has several leaf colors and flower covers to select from. There is also a large flowered and leafed version called the "whopper". Pentas are another good choice for flowers in the shade. Coleus and caladiums do not produce flowers, but they have colorful foliage.

Q. Do deer eat vitex? What other large shrubs and small trees will they leave without eating?

A. You can never be sure about deer. Individuals in different neighborhoods have different preferences. They generally all pass on vitex and Texas mountain laurel. Thyralis and esperanza usually are not eaten. Mexican plum, pomegranate, yaupon holly, viburnum, and pittosporum also usually escape. One tactic to prevent the deer from tasting new plantings is to spray them with Liquid Fence at planting and once every week for 3 weeks. The Liquid Fence usually protects normally deer proof plants from being tasted or pulled up because of curiosity.