

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. I have a 21 ft Viburnum hedge that is 30 inches wide that I would like to trim out the dead branches. The hedge is 20 years old and I keep it pruned to 36 inches tall. I would like to trim it down to 14-16 inches tall in order to access and remove the dead branches. Is pruning down to 14 inches too severe and is it too hot to do it now?

A. The usual time to prune Viburnum hedges is in the spring after the bloom. You are a bit late, but it will probably do fine if you have access to water for irrigation of the growing hedge plants. Do you think you can prune out the dead pieces and only reduce the height to 24 inches? It would also help to apply some slow release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) to provide nutrients for the regrowth. If you are not worried about the bloom, you could wait and prune in the winter.

Q. We have a large planting of zinnias plus milkweed, mistflower, lantana, duranta, salvia, and mistflower. We have some queen and black swallowtail butterflies but not as many as we would expect. Is it the weather or is there some other cause of the reduced butterfly populations?

A. In our neighborhood we usually experience a big jump in the number of individuals and species after July 10. I do not know if that is a coincidence, but it is about the same time as the purple martin young leave the nest and the birds start assembling for their migration to South America. The timing is probably important for weather and other population expansion factors as well. See if early July in your neighborhood is the magic time for more butterflies.

Q. Our tomatoes have done very well this spring but now the leaves look like they are infested with spider mites. Is there something that we can use to treat them? What about the seaweed extract that you talk about on your radio program?

A. It is time to pull the spring tomato plants. Plant new transplants for the fall after mid-July. The seaweed extract when diluted to 2 tablespoons per gallon of water will slow down the development of spider mite populations but will not reduce existing populations. For more information visit plantanswers.com. When you pull the spider mite infected plants try not to spread the adult mites all over the planting area. Discard the infested plants in a garbage sack.

Q. We applied XL to our sand bur infested lawn on March 1. It has been effective in limiting the germination of new sand bur plants. What happens if we do not follow-up with the recommended mid-summer dose of XL to our lawn?

A. Based on my experience your lawn will probably have a crop of sand burs germinate in late summer to produce stickers this fall. In some cases, if the weather cooperates the burs will not germinate, but I would not count on it!

Q. Our Texas mountain laurel has been attractive for 15 years but now one of the main stems has died. Any ideas what might have caused it. What should we do?

A. The scenario you are describing is not unusual. Texas mountain laurels are susceptible to fungal or bacterial infections that kill individual stems. Check the dead stem on your plant for wounds or growths at the base of the dead branch. The good news is that you can usually cut out the infected stem and the rest of the mountain laurel will continue to live and bloom.