

Question and Answer

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Q. I need a tall shrub that will work as a hedge. The problem is that we only have three feet of width to work with. The amount of sun varies from morning sun only, to sun into the early afternoon for the rest of the 30 feet. Any ideas?

A. Standard yaupon would work if you are willing to prune it for the width 2 times per year. It will eventually reach whatever height you need up to about 20 feet tall. Another shrub to consider is Sandankwa viburnum. It is evergreen and grows to 7 feet tall. With minor pruning each year it could fit into the 3 feet of available width.

Q. There are worm-like caterpillars hanging from our live oak trees. Are they a problem to the trees? Should we spray them with something?

A. There are 3 types of caterpillars that feed on new live oak leaves in the spring. Several hang from threads the way you describe. Even though they feed on the foliage they are not a serious problem for a healthy tree and will be gone in a few weeks. On a small tree you could spray a BT product like Dipel on the leaves where they are feeding but we usually ignore them.

Q. We are almost as much into butterflies as you are. Tell us about the porter weed which you talk about in your presentations as one of your 4 favorite nectar sources for the summer along with tropical milkweeds, zinnias, and Gregg's mistflower.

A. I describe the porter weed as the weirdest of the 4 all-star plants because of its growth and blooming pattern. There are two versions of the porter weed on the market. The full-size grows to 3 feet tall and has purple flowers. The dwarf version is 2 feet tall with red flowers. Both versions grow in a weeping configuration. The weirdness comes into play because the bloom stalks are among the weeping stems and the active bloom is only about 1 inch along the stem at any one time. The bloom is richly colored and migrates up the stem as the summer progresses. During the summer there is an intense competition between butterflies and even hummingbirds for access to the flowers. The theory is that the porter weed nectar is exceptionally potent. The larger porter weed resprouted from the roots this spring, but the dwarf version did not survive.

Q. Our tomatoes last year were devastated by spider mites. Is there any kind of preventative treatment?

A. Some gardeners have success with using 2 tablespoons of seaweed extract mixed in one gallon of water sprayed once/week under the leaves. The spray doesn't eliminate the mites, but it seems to slow down their reproduction and damage. If they appear after you have begun the treatment increase the spray frequency to twice per week.

Q. What is the advantage in mowing St Augustine grass at 3.5 inches like you recommend. I think it looks better at 2 inches.

A. At 3.5 inches St Augustine does a better job of competing with weeds, especially Bermuda grass. It has more shade tolerance than the weeds and the longer blades shade out the weeds.