

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. I thought deer did not eat lawn grass? Deer in my neighborhood seem to be grazing it like sheep. Do you have a theory?

A. Yes, I think if you look closely they are actually eating broadleaf weeds like horseherb. Horseherb is also called straggler daisy and is a favorite deer browse. Research indicates deer eat some grass but not much. They prefer stems and foliage of broadleaf weeds.

Q. We don't like the look of our esperanza and thyrallis without leaves. Can we cut it back now? How tall should the stems that we leave be?

A. You can cut the root hardy plants such as lantana, summer salvias, thyrallis, esperanza, poinciana, firebush, and duranta back now or wait until mid-February. If the tops are dead from cold they should be cut to ground-level. If the tops are alive they can be left at 3 feet or any height you are comfortable with. I think they look and bloom best if they are all cut to ground level.

Q. Can you describe how to prune our peach trees?

A. Basically you open up the middle for air and light penetration by cutting out stems growing into the middle. Reduce height with thinning cuts. Thinning cuts remove the offending (highest) branch by cutting it at its origin on the lower branch. You need new growth wood from the last year for blooms and fruit so you leave the red (new growth) stems on the perimeter of the open bowl. The perimeter should form an angle of about 60degrees with the trunk. Visit plantanswers.com for more instructions and diagrams.

Q. Our tomato and pepper plants look finished for the year. Should I try to preserve them or can they go in the compost pile? When can we plant the new tomatoes for the spring?

A. Yes, pull the tomato and pepper plants. Plant new tomato transplants about March 21 and new pepper plants after about April 15.

Q. We have not aerated the lawn for 2 years now. Can we rent an aerator and do it now?

A. Yes, aeration is an important practice to keep the lawn healthy. Follow up the aeration by top dressing with one-half inch of compost. The aeration creates channels so air, water and nutrients can reach the roots. Add compost and the organic material filters down into the root zone. Aeration and top-dressing is effective in reducing compaction and is the only way to restore organic material to the established lawn.

Q. Something is eating our primula foliage. We have sprayed spinosad but the damage continues. Do you have any suggestions?

A. Primula are one of the favorite food plants for slugs and snails. Apply a slug and snail bait immediately and then re-apply every 10 days.

Q. We want to treat the ball moss in our live oak trees. What should we use and when is the best time to make the treatment?

A. Ball moss is not a parasite or threat to your trees but if you want to treat it use Kocide according to label instructions. It requires a powerful sprayer. The best time to treat for ball moss is next month when the tree drops its leaves.