

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Remind me how I should mix the sugar and water for our hummingbird feeder. Our grandchildren are visiting next weekend and we traditionally put out our feeders with their help.

A. Mix one-part sugar with four parts water by volume. As far as I can find there are no research results that definitively determine that food coloring is a problem for the hummingbirds, but it is unnecessary. The birds find clear sugar water just as readily as they do the red colored sugar water. You can mix a quantity of sugar water at a time and store it in a one-gallon container in the refrigerator. Rinse out and refill the feeder every week. Put the old sugar water in a saucer for the butterflies, they relish stale sugar water!

Q. Our lawn looks great right now. We have mowed the grass several times and are inclined to fertilize. We keep hearing you emphasizing on the radio, however, to wait until you have mowed real grass twice. How can we tell if the green grass in our lawn is our St Augustine grass or a winter weed grass?

A. The weed grass that looks a little like St Augustine is rescue grass. Rescue grass has a wide blade that originates from a clump. There are no runners or rhizomes (interconnected underground stems). If you pull it up, you see the clump from which all stems originate. The winter weed grasses are growing vigorously now, trying to set seed. Soon they will turn pale and decline and make room for the St Augustine grass. Fertilize with a slow-release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 after mid-April.

Q. What are some blooming plants that we can plant that the deer won't eat?

A. Iris, vinca, four-o'clock, thyrallis, esperanza, lantana, oleander, datura, Mexican honeysuckle, oregano, viburnum, pomegranate, standard pittosporum, primrose jasmine and salvias all work in my neighborhood. It is a good idea to spray any new plantings with "Liquid Fence" or other repellent to discourage the curious deer from testing them. Spray once per week for 3 weeks.

Q. We learned last fall that our raised bed garden has nematodes, what can we do to control them?

A. You can plant a cereal rye in the winter to trap some of the nematodes but there are no chemical treatments available at this time. Visit plantanswers.com for the detailed information on using the cereal rye effectively. In terms of using the garden, some grassy type of vegetables such as sweet corn and onions seem to grow in nematode infected soil. Select the tomato varieties such as Celebrity, Tycoon, BHN 968 and Valley Cat that are nematode resistant.

Q. Is there anyway to treat webworms in our young pecans and fruit trees? We don't like to spray but they eat all the leaves.

A. The most effective sprays are the Bt products such as Dipel, or Bio-Worm Killer. Bt is an organic spray that is applied to the foliage where the worms are feeding. It will work for your young pecans and fruit trees if you have access to a good sprayer. If you live in a residential area, however, and your trees are tall, it is difficult to spray. You may also want to use a tall cane pole and just rip the webs open. In many cases the wasps that feed on webworms will move in and remove the worms, beneficial insects in action. A good reason to tolerate wasps.