

Gardening Q&A

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Q. Why don't folks grow maples in this area? They are so attractive and were invincible up north.

A. Most maple species do not like alkaline soils or our hot dry weather. Some gardeners grow Japanese maples in enriched (compost) in courtyards in morning sun, but it is a challenge. Silver maples usually last for a few years before they decline and die. There are two options that are reasonable. The Shantung Maple (*Acer truncatum*) is a 20 ft. exotic maple that has been identified as a Texas Superstar. It can be found in some area nurseries. Shantung Maple can be expected to prosper in area landscapes to provide good fall color. The Big Tooth Maple is native to Hill Country canyons and will survive in area landscapes if the soil is well-drained and enriched with compost.

Q. There are knobs or galls on the leaves of our young pecan trees. Do you know what they are? Is it a major problem? How can we control it?

A. The galls are probably caused by phylloxera, which is a small aphid like insect. The presence of phylloxera is very noticeable and can contribute to a reduction in the tree's vigor but it is not a direct threat. When you see the galls in the spring it is too late to treat this year's infestation but put a note on your calendar to treat the trees with dormant oil next winter. The dormant oil will suffocate overwintering insects and their eggs. When applied to stems and the trunk.

Q. Remind us what we can plant for color in the flower garden for the summer? What about for the shade? Are there any annual flowers that are deer-proof?

A. In the sun consider zinnias, vinca, cosmos, moss roses and purslane. In the shade plant penta, caladium, coleus, or semperfloren begonias. The related "Whopper" begonias are also excellent for the shade. Penta, moss rose, purslane, vinca, and begonias are best for containers. The deer in some neighborhoods pass up zinnias but they always seem to leave vinca alone.

Q. Are there any disadvantages using organic fertilizer for the lawn?

A. When you compare the cost of nitrogen in organic fertilizer to the same amount in a manufactured fertilizer, the organic nitrogen is more expensive. The nitrogen in organic fertilizer is all a slow release source so it's more difficult to provide the immediate release of nitrogen the lawn needs to green it up in the spring. A slow-release manufactured lawn fertilizer is 50% fast release nitrogen and 50% a slow release source.

Q. My tomatoes are looking good and setting fruit but in past years we always started the harvest season out with some fruit with black areas on the fruit. Everyone says it is caused by a calcium

deficiency due to the soil drying out between watering. How can I prevent the problem from happening this year?

A. Keeping the soil moist is the key to reducing blossom-end-rot but sometimes it is hard to prevent because it is related to soil moisture, weather, and plant development. It is hard to avoid some blossom end rot if you're plant is loaded with fruit and air temperatures increase so that evaporation rates increase quickly! Is especially likely to happen in containers where the soil reservoir and root size could be limited. It is a minor problem, don't spend too much time worrying about it.