

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. I buy most of my gardening supplies at our local feed store. The owner and his staff are knowledgeable and friendly but every once and awhile they become somewhat arbitrary about an issue. They are advocating raising the mowing height on the lawn during the drought to reduce loss of water from evaporation. I brought up your argument that taller grass blades mean more water loss from transpiration.

A. If you have been following our discussion on Gardening South Texas radio program, lots of factors contribute to evaporation and transpiration so there seems to be research results that support both arguments. Grass type, soil depth, organic content, state of growth (active or dormant), moisture availability, weed presence, and other factors help determine water use/loss by a lawn. The net result is that there is usually no clear advantage to either strategy in terms of water conservation. I think the best recommendation is to keep your lawn height at the same height in the summer as the spring. Consider 1.5 inch or less for Bermuda grass, 3.5 inches for St Augustine, 2 inches for zoysia, and over 5 inches for buffalo grass.

Q. The sweet peas were slow to start this year, but they finished spectacularly. I have pulled the vines off of the trellis and noticed all the pods loaded with seed. Can it be stored for use this winter?

A. Yes, an easy option is to spread the pulled vines out on a tarp so that the seeds are collected when the pods open. When it is obvious that the pods have opened, and the seeds are on the tarp, collect the vines to be discarded in the compost pile. Collect the seeds in pill bottles labeled with the date and description. Begin planting sweet peas in mid-November. Soak the seed overnight before planting.

Q. We need a hedge with plants 8 feet tall. It is for a planting 100 ft long that includes both shady and sunny sections. We are also blessed with deer! Are there any options to consider?

A. Some come to mind. It depends on how much space is available for width. Primrose jasmine is evergreen and makes a dense deer-proof hedge that is most comfortable if it has 8ft of width to fill. The naturally weeping shaped plant also has waxy yellow blooms in late winter. Sandankwa viburnum will reach 8ft tall. It is also evergreen but is comfortable with 5feet of hedge width. If the hedge can lean on a fence, Carolina jessamine may also work. It is a sun or shade leaning vine with evergreen foliage and blooms in early spring. Deer do not seem to eat it.

Q. When can we plant the fall crop of tomatoes? Are there recommended varieties especially for the fall?

A. Nurseries should be offering tomato transplants in July. The best tomatoes for autumn planting are determinate, heat-setters that can beat the freezes. Watch for Sunbrite, HM 1823, Surefire, Lavaca,

Celebrity, BHN 968 (cherry), Ruby Crush (cherry), 444, Phoenix, Celebrity, Roma Surprise, Red Deuce and Valley Cat.