

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. What would cause my crape myrtle leaves to turn yellow? They are blooming and there is new growth, but the new growth has yellow leaves.

A. There are a number of plants, including crape myrtles, that have difficulty in obtaining enough nitrogen and or iron from the soil when they are growing aggressively in the spring. All things equal they would prefer an acid soil where the nutrients are more readily available. St Augustine grass is another plant in that category. They eventually catch up, but the temporary deficit can be addressed by fertilizing with a fertilizer like Iron Plus or using a foliage spray that includes nitrogen and iron.

Q. This is the first year that we have purple martins in our new birdhouses. It appears that the parents are feeding young that are about to leave the nest. Is that possible? What happens now? Is there a second clutch of eggs laid. The situation is remarkably chaotic. There is so much noise and flying in and out!

A. Yes, one or more martin houses full of parents and young of the year is exciting. As chaotic as it is, it will all change quickly in the next few weeks. The young will leave the nest and create new tension for a short period as they attempt to make the transition to independent adults. All the birds will join groups at several assembly points and then head for South America before mid-July. It will be time to lower the houses, clean out the nest boxes, and block the entry holes to end English sparrow nesting when the martins leave.

Q. As per your recommendation we used a long cane pole to rip open the webs of the webworms in our pecan trees. We could only reach about half the nests but with those that we reached the wasps showed up almost immediately and began carrying off the caterpillars. It was amazing. I also was able to use a pressure sprayer to disrupt the other nests. Between the heat, the mockingbirds and wrens, and the wasps, all but 2 of the nests were dealt with. Thanks for the advice.

A. Yes, the cane pole trick works well. It makes you appreciate the wasps. We should be less eager to destroy wasp nests. The pressure washer sounds like a good tool as well.

Q. Is there a trick to get bougainvillea to bloom? We bought several showy plants in full bloom that have quit blooming after just 4 weeks. They are in full sun and we fertilized with Osmocote but now the leaves are even falling off. How much should we water?

A. One of the most important issues with bougainvillea is not to over-water. Let the soil dry out between watering. Some gardeners even let the plants wilt before they irrigate. It sounds like that Excessive irrigation may be your problem.

Q. I have peppers, eggplant, southern peas and Mexican squash growing in the vegetable garden, later in July I will add a new set of tomato plants. Is it worthwhile to grow that Malabar spinach that you and Dr Parsons have been talking about on your radio show?

A. Yes you can use the Malabar spinach just like regular spinach except it grows on a trellis or tomato cage. It has a pleasant taste and is nutritious. Keep it well watered and fertilize just like your cool weather greens.