

Gardening Q&A

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Q. We have a St Augustine Palmetto lawn that something is killing. I don't see grubs or chinch bugs but suspect that one of them is the culprit. The grass pulls back in great swaths. We applied Grub X and Amdro plus we gave it extra water but there was no response. Can you recommend someone with expertise to look at it? Another thing that makes me think it was caused by grubs is that there were several visits by a racoon or opossum and some digging.

A. Call the Texas A&M AgriLife extension Agent for your county and see if she or he will look at it. How did you run your water experiment? Did the grass on the edge of the dead area respond and expand its green area? The Grub X would work to kill insects if it was applied earlier in the year. Mature grubs spread through the soil and don't feed close to the surface where the insecticide would be effective, Apply it about June 1 next year. Amdro is a fire ant bait. Review and follow the insecticide (Grub X) label instructions.

Q. What is the issue with girdling the vascular system of a newly planted tree with a string mower? Do we need to replace the tree?

A. If you wound the bark of a newly planted tree to the point of girdling the surface bark that covers the vascular system it breaks the connection between the roots and the foliage so nutrients or water taken up by the roots never make it to the leaves for the production of the plant parts. Sometimes the tree will heal but not always, If the tree lives the growth rate is reduced. Yes, it is usually best to replace a tree damaged to the point of being girdled by a string mower or even a lawn mower.

Q. What is the best way to harvest kale and Swiss chard? Is it the same for spinach?

A. I have had success by removing new growth leaves as I need them for salads and recipes. If you do not take more than about one-third of the available foliage the plant continues producing new foliage. It works the same for spinach except it is a slower grower. You may get plenty of greens from 3 or 4 kale or Swiss chard plants, but it will probably require ten spinach plants to supply a small family.

Q. Are there cool weather flowers that can be grown and harvested as cut flowers that have a good fragrance? We thought we smelled some in a neighbor's garden the other day, but it turned out to be night blooming jasmine and yellow pansies which did not work well as cut flowers. He said there was some but couldn't remember which?

A. My favorite are sweet peas and stocks. Plant sweet peas by seed after soaking the seed overnight. Use a tomato cage or other structure as a trellis. Stock are available at area nurseries as transplants. They both make attractive and fragrant cut flowers.

Q. Our nurseryman said now was the time to plant shade trees. What are the recommended species?

A. This is a great time to plant shade trees. Consider Texas red oak, Mexican white oak, live oak, bur oak, cedar elm, Mexican sycamore, chinkapin oak, or Lacey oak.