

Gardening Q&A

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Q. How come nobody talks about Xeriscape Landscaping like they used to? We still seem to waste lots of water on landscaping by planting inappropriate plants and applying unnecessary water?

A. Certainly the word "Xeriscape" is used less than it was but I believe the 7 principles 1) Good Planning, 2) Soil Improvement) 3) Low Water Use Plant Choices, 4) Mulch Use 5) Efficient Irrigation 6) Reduced Use of Turfgrass, and 7) Good Maintenance have been incorporated into landscape planning and management. I believe if you checked the statistics of most Cities that the per capita water use for landscapes has been reduced. The word "Xeriscape" is not used as much but the Xeriscape Principles are being implemented.

Q. What does it take to get crape myrtles to bloom? We planted ours 2 years ago, but they still have not bloomed. Is there such a thing as pruning or fertilizing too much?

A. Crape myrtles are a desirable choice for full sun landscape You can chose from among many bloom colors and you can choose the right size for the planting spot. You should not have to prune much. The usual problem limiting blooming is when crape myrtles are planted in the shade. For fertilization apply one cup per inch of tree diameter every spring. Slow release lawn fertilizer 19-5-9 works well. Prune out dead wood every year. If the crape myrtle that you describe is in full sun, give it another year to begin blooming.

Q. The fire ants have moved into our half- whiskey barrels where we grow our Mexican lime and Meyer lemon. Both trees are loaded with fruit, otherwise I would just apply some acephate to the soil. Am I right thinking that it is inappropriate to apply acephate to a food crop? What are my other options?

A. Yes, the label for acephate products does not allow application of the systemic insecticide to food crops. Review the labels for one or more of the organic products that have Spinosad for an active ingredient to control fire ants. It would also work to spray the plants at the base with malathion. Malathion has a waiting period before fruit or vegetables can be used after spraying, but it is a short period. Follow label instructions of whatever insecticide that you decide to use.

Q. Remind us what are the best plants to attract butterflies to our landscape this summer and fall?

A. Zinnias, mistflower, milkweed, lantana, salvia, Mexican flame vine, passion vine, porter weed, Fanick's phlox, cosmos, mint marigold, duranta, penta, and fall aster are all excellent nectar sources for butterflies.

Q. What is the schedule for planting the winter garden?

A. We plant fall tomatoes in late July. Plant broccoli and the other cole crops in September. Also plant carrots, radish, turnips, rutabagas, and beets in September. Wait until October to plant spinach transplants. Onions can be planted in December. Prepare the soil by incorporating 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow release lawn fertilizer into every 100 sq. feet of bed.