

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Do deer eat iris? My grandfather is from Oklahoma and he says that the deer in his neighborhood pass up the iris blooms and foliage. I was complaining that deer eat all blooming plants here, that's why my yard was so barren!

A. Deer do not eat iris in the Texas neighborhoods that I am familiar with. You may also want to grow, esperanza, thyrallis, four-o'clock, lantanas, salvias and Texas sage. They all bloom and the deer do not seem to eat the blooms or foliage.

Q. We always attend the San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo and like to purchase the current Rodeo tomato from the Master Gardeners. Last year we planted them directly in the garden but they did not perform very well. We think it was because the soil was too cold. Is there any strategy that works to use tomatoes before the soil warms up?

A. Yes, we call it "potting up" the tomatoes. Fill a one gallon container with potting mix and Osmocote. Plant the transplant into the container. Place the "potted up" tomatoes in the sun out of the wind. A greenhouse is great but most gardeners don't have one. The south side of the house works. The key to success is to never let the plants cool down below 45 degrees. Move them inside on cool nights. Plant the tomatoes in the garden about April 1. By then they will be quite large and growing fast.

Q. My County Extension Agent says that ball moss does not hurt oak trees. I told him he was nuts! It kills the branches where it grows on my oak trees. You agree, don't you?

A. No, I agree with your County Agent. Ball moss is not a parasite. It grows on the surface of the oak branches and makes its living from nutrients taken from the air (epiphyte). Ball moss can even grow on fence wires and utility lines in valleys and towns. The branches that are dying on your live oaks are being shaded to the point where they do not get enough light to maintain themselves.

Q. Do we need to fertilize our cool weather flowers like we do the vegetables? My snapdragons and stocks look like they are declining.

A. Yes, the cool weather color plants should be sidedressed with slow release lawn fertilizer once per month. Fertilize the snapdragons and stocks along with the other flowers but they may be declining temporarily to colder weather. Snapdragons, stocks, and petunias usually quit blooming for a while in January and February because of the cold weather. They will have a second flush of bloom later in February through April.

Q. My peaches have scale insects. How do I treat it?

A. Apply a drench of dormant oil to all the trunk and stems. It will suffocate the scale in their calcium covering. Follow the label instructions on the dormant oil. Two of the requirements are that the oil be diluted and applied during a period where temperatures will stay above 45 degrees for 48 hours.