

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. We were at a party and the host had a plant with quarter size waxy yellow blooms. It was 8 ft. tall and 8 ft. around with weeping branches. The leaves were small and some were brown from the freeze. We did not get a chance to ask what it was. Do you have any idea from my description?

A. You may be describing primrose jasmine. It is a relatively drought tolerant evergreen shrub that will grow in sun or shade. The deer do not eat primrose jasmine.

Q. My Mexican lime looks completely dead from the freeze. Should I go ahead and replace it?

A. Don't be too quick to discard the lime. In many cases the plants are growing on their own roots and will send up stems from the roots. They will completely replace the top in one growing season and will produce fruit again 1 year from now.

Q. We are feeding the birds this winter. For the first time we have provided suet. There are several small birds that are hard to identify that are eating the suet. We recognize the myrtle warbler and Carolina wren. The smallest bird has a white eye-ring and wing bars. Another bird looks like a warbler but is a weak yellow and very plain. Any ideas?

A. Based on the birds that everyone else is seeing, I believe the small bird with wing-bars is a ruby-crowned kinglet. The plain warbler is probably an orange-crowned warbler. They are both very fond of suet.

Q. Our live oak leaves have begun to fall. Can we use them in the compost pile? I have heard that leaves are not good raw material for compost because they are low in nitrogen.

A. Dry leaves are low in moisture and nitrogen but fresh live oak leaves are good raw material for the compost pile. Even dry leaves decompose relatively quickly. In addition to material for the compost pile, leaves can be used as mulch. Leaves can even be mowed on the lawn and they will decompose to provide organic material and nutrients.

Q. As your lawn care calendar recommends we are going to aerate and top dress our lawn next week. You recommend compost but our mulch/compost supplier says that he has a special top dressing material for the job at the same price as compost. Should I use it?

A. I don't recommend the "top dressing" mix because it includes compost and sand. The sand is filler material as far as I am concerned. For the same price why not use all active ingredient?

Q. The nursery already has tomato transplants. When can they be planted in the garden?

A. If you plant them before the middle of March you can expect them to “harden off” (stop growing). The soil and air temperatures are too cold now. Sometimes the selection of varieties is best early in the season. One tactic that is effective is to “pot them up”. Fill one gallon containers with potting mix fertilized with Osmocote. Place the containers in a sunny location sheltered from the wind. Move them inside if temps under 40 degrees are forecast. In such a situation they will grow very fast and will be ready to start producing shortly after they are planted in the garden.