

## Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. What is the key to attracting purple martins to a birdhouse? We have had a house for 2 years without any martins: sparrows and starlings, but no martins.

A. Sometimes it is difficult to deduce why martins pick one area and pass up other areas. Two years is really not that long. Have you taken the house down both years and cleaned out the sparrow and starling nests? Do you take it down each year and put it back up about March 1? Is the house at least 12 feet in the air? Fifteen feet seems to be better. Are the entrance holes 2 inches in diameter and the cabins about 6 by 6 inches? Is there an open area of 20 ft. on all sides of the bird house and at least one side with 50 feet? The martins need to be able to glide into the house.

Q. What is the best milkweed for providing Monarchs nectar and egg-laying sites?

A. Based on my experiences and reading, it appears that the tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curvassavica*) is hard to beat in the terms you describe. It has a long blooming period and produces lots of blooms. Using it along with the native milkweeds such as; green, antelope horn, white, purple and common is probably the best way to meet the Monarchs needs. Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) has attractive blooms but is smaller and does not bloom as much in my landscape.

Q. In the past you have recommended some type of organic pesticide as a preventative on tomatoes for spider mites. What is it?

A. Research indicates that applying a solution of seaweed extract to the bottoms of the leaves every week slows down spider mite population growth. When spider mites appear increase the spray frequency to twice per week. Mix 2 tablespoons of the liquid extract in 1 gallon of water.

Q. Our onions have developed 6 stems per plant and look good but don't have any bulb development. I fertilize every 4 weeks with slow release lawn fertilizer (1cup/8ft. row). We have thinned the plants to 4 inches between each one by using the middle plants for green onions. Do you think there is a problem? When should the bulbs be produced?

A. It sounds like you are doing everything right. The bulbs will begin enlarging soon. There is still 2.5 months left until the expected harvest date (June 1). The tops will flop over when they are ready to be harvested.

Q. When should we fertilize the lawn? It is beginning to green-up.

A. Wait until you have mowed real grass twice. Usually about May 1.

Q. Is there any easy way to control the oak seedlings that are sprouting now?

A. The "seedlings" are probably oak suckers sprouting from the roots of your live oaks growing in the landscape. It is a common occurrence in our shallow, heavy soils. Don't use any herbicides on them because of the link to the lawn trees. Mow as many as possible with the lawn mower and the remainder can be cut down with the string mower if you catch them when they are small.

