

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Okay, My lawn is turning yellow. I checked and it is actually the St Augustine grass, not the winter grassy weeds declining. Is there anything I can do to green it up?

A. The 19-5-9 slow release lawn fertilizer available at many local nurseries may do the job because it has 4% iron in addition to the 19 % nitrogen. Another tactic that works is to use Iron Plus fertilizer which is nitrogen plus iron. It is a fast release nitrogen source so you may want to consider a light application of 19-5-9 slow release fertilizer followed by a light application of Iron Plus. Be careful not to add more fertilizer than you need.

Q. What is something that we can grow under a live oak tree? It is shady and the tree roots seem to compete with whatever we plant.

A. The usual planting under the oak trees is Asiatic jasmine. It is shade tolerant and can hold its own after it is established with regular watering for a year. If the trees aren't too thick, "Texas Gold Columbine" works. I have also seen monkey grass and liriopse grown as a ground cover under oaks.

Q. We are faced with a dilemma trying to establish milkweed for the butterflies. Monarchs have already laid eggs on the plants and the caterpillars have eaten all the foliage. Do you have any advice? I want to produce Monarchs but need to get the milkweed established for long term production.

A. Yes, that is a dilemma. The Monarchs are nearly finished with their visit to Central Texas for the spring. Let these caterpillars mature and then protect the plants with agricultural fabric on a tomato cage so they can grow back. If they aren't protected the first year plants may be used by the Queen butterflies this summer as an egg laying site and will not manage any growth. You can pull the fabric in August for the return of the Monarchs. They won't be laying eggs but will use the plants as a nectar source in the fall. The fabric lets through enough sun for the plants to prosper.

Q. Our Mexican limes that froze back this winter have not sent up new shoots. Has it been long enough for us to declare them dead and buy some replacements?

A. That is what I did and now one of my frozen limes has sent up a shoot. I also dug in the container of the second one. The roots still seem to be alive. If they continue to revive it appears it will be a long recovery period. Dig into the root system of your plants and see if they appear to still be alive. You will have to make a decision whether to wait until you are sure or replace them now. At worst you will have a few extra lime trees.

Q What can we plant in our new raised bed vegetable garden? The soil has a great texture but my neighbor who is a Master Gardener says that you recommend adding a generous amount of slow release lawn fertilizer because commercial soil mixes that are dominated by compost have very low levels of nitrogen.

- A. Yes, incorporate 10 cups of 19-5-9 fertilizer into every 1000 sq. ft. of the bed. You can plant tomatoes if you find large transplants. Pepper and eggplant transplants can be planted. Plant okra and southern peas by seed.