

Question and Answer Article

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Q. We got our first water bill for the summer. It was outrageous. We definitely can't afford such a bill every month. We have Bermuda grass in the front and St Augustine in the backyard. What are our options if the whole summer is dry? Will we lose our lawn grass?

A. You have some relatively painless options. Discontinue watering the Bermuda grass. The lawn will go brown but the grass won't die. When the rains return, the lawn will green up again. The St Augustine grass is not as drought tolerant as Bermuda grass but it has the capability to survive if you water it every 2 weeks rather than every week. It looks better if watered every week but the grass will survive with water every two weeks. The options were tested in the drought survivability tests conducted on lawn grass varieties in San Antonio in 2004.

Q. What small trees would you plant in a yard to provide berries for birds? We already have hackberries.

A. My favorite berry producing trees in addition to hackberries are mulberry, Texas persimmon, anaqua, Chinese pistache, and pyracantha. Figs also provide fruit that attracts the berry eating birds.

Q. My milkweed that I planted for the Monarchs is loaded with aphids. Are they a problem? If so, how should I control them?

A. Milkweeds are notorious for supporting large populations of yellow aphids. They aren't usually a problem that requires treatment but you can reduce the population by spraying them off the plants once/week with the hose spray.

Q Tell us about using mulch during the summer when the soil is dry. Does it prevent rain from reaching the plant roots?

A. With a light rain mulch can reduce the amount of water that penetrates the soil, but generally the net effect of mulch is to conserve soil moisture to make it more available to desirable plants. Mulch reduces evaporation of soil moisture and reduces weeds that would compete with desirable plants for the moisture. With a rainfall of 3/8 of an inch or more the rain passes through the mulch and enters the soil.

Q. What are the webs I see in the morning on my live oak trunks? They reflect the sun and are attractive but also look menacing. Are they a problem?

A. No, you are probably seeing bark lice webs. Neither the insects nor the webs harm the trees or humans. Enjoy the reflections from the webs for the short time that they are around.

Q. You recommend Amaze quite often to prevent sandburs and other annual weeds. Is it still on the market? When I ask for it at my favorite nursery they say it is no longer sold.

A. There have been ownership and marketing changes but it is still manufactured and sold as Green Light Amaze by Scotts. It is definitely harder to obtain. Other products to consider are Crabgrass Preventer, XL, and Dimension.