

Gardening Q&A

Distribute 7-10-2017

Q. Do purple martins eat butterflies? It seems like our butterfly population has been low until now. The martins have left the nest and are assembling before they head to South America. Now butterflies seem more common.

A. I have seen medium size butterflies in the mouth of female martins feeding their young so I think they eat some varieties. I have experienced the same increase in butterflies that you describe after the martins leave. It could be related to martin feeding but it is also probably a timing situation. More butterfly populations increase on or about July 1. Plants necessary for egg-laying may mature or nectar plants may be more available. It is an interesting Question.

Q. What are the recommended tomato varieties for fall planting? It is time, right?

A. Yes it is time to plant the fall tomatoes. Use most of the recommended heat-setting determinate varieties from the spring. Use Red Deuce, Tycoon, HM 1826, Phoenix, 444, Celebrity, Valley Cat and Bobcat for large fruit. In case the cold weather arrives early this year also use very fast producing varieties with small fruit like BHN 968 and Roma Surprise.

Q What would prevent my crape myrtle from blooming? It has been in the same spot for 10 years but has not bloomed this year or last.

A. The first question that needs to be asked is, "is it growing in the shade now"? Have the shade trees grown up and shaded it? Crape myrtles require full sun to bloom. They also bloom on new growth. If the plant is not producing new stems, add a few cups of slow release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) under the drip line and give it some deep watering by letting the hose run on the drip line.

Q How much should we have to water our coleus? They are large and wilt every day. Am I doing something wrong?

A. Coleus are not xeriscape plants. They have a relatively small root system to support a large top. When you water are you applying enough water to encourage larger root growth? Try to cut back to watering every 2 days but apply more water at each watering for a while.

Q. What happened to my figs this year? Lots were produced but they ripened very slowly. So slow that the squirrels and birds were able to harvest more fruit that we did.

A. Based on the experiences in my own garden and that reported by other gardeners your experience was common. I think the slow ripening was related to water. Last year there was plenty of spring and

early summer rain. This year there was not enough moisture in May and June to encourage a general ripening. It would probably have helped the process if you used 6 inches of mulch and irrigated like commercial growers.