

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Our Whopper Begonias have been attractive all summer but now they are looking ragged. Do you know what caused it and what we should do to repair them? Are they finished for the season?

A. Begonias should have been tipped back about August 15 to encourage them to send up sprouts from the base. The plants that were allowed to grow tall and leggy were damaged by a combination of the hot weather and the winds and rain. Slugs and snails also attacked the foliage in some cases. Go ahead and trim them back to remove the tattered foliage and they should send out new stems and foliage now that the weather has cooled. Apply slug and snail bait and give the plants a shot of fertilizer, Osmocote or a soluble fertilizer.

Q. You were talking about applying a "winterizer" fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio to the lawn now for winter cold tolerance and a fast green up in the spring on your radio show. I have a zoysia lawn and use a liquid fertilizer with a 10-6-10 formula every 4 to 5 weeks. It seems to work well?

A. The common granular fertilizer is 18-6-12. It takes about 5lbs of it to achieve the 1lb of recommended nitrogen per 1000sq ft. in the fall fertilization. The application of a liquid fertilizer probably works okay but it would be a much more expensive source of the recommended nitrogen.

Q. My favorite nursery has run out of bluebonnet seed. They say there is a shortage of seed because of the weather over the last two years. They have transplants and recommended that I plant them. Will they work to create a naturalized patch of flowers, just like the seed?

A. Yes, plant the transplants in groups 5 or more about 18inches apart in full sun on a site where there isn't much competition from grasses or weeds. They will bloom and drop their seed to provide the next year's plants.

Q. We planted Texas mountain laurel plants three years ago. They have grown quite a bit but have never bloomed. Now they have some silver twisted growths on the end of many of the stems. What caused it? What should we do about it?

A. I believe you are describing the flower buds! The silver twisted stems will produce the purple flowers with the strong, pleasant grape Kool-Aid fragrance. Just let them be.

Q. Which oak should we plant for a quality shade tree that grows at a rapid rate? We love live oaks but they grow so slow.

A. My favorite is the Texas Red Oak. At some nurseries they call it a Shumard Oak. The important factor is that it originate from an acorn raised from parent trees growing on alkaline soil. Mexican white oak is also an excellent choice. It can grow almost as fast as the Texas red oak and qualifies as an evergreen just like the live oak.