

Gardening Q&A

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Q. Is now a good time to plant Bermuda grass by seed. Can we plant any of the other grasses by seed?

A. May is the best time to plant Bermuda grass by seed. The soil is warm, and we usually receive ample rain in May and June. A Bermuda lawn requires full sun to prosper. The best route is to spray the area with Round-up to kill the weeds. Wait at least one week to see a color change that indicates the Round-up has done the job. Next, spread two inches of compost over the area to be planted and till it in. Rake the seed bed level and spread the seed over the surface with a hand crank seeder. Water it in and irrigate everyday for a week and every 2 days for two weeks. By the third week the seed should be germinated. Water twice per week for several weeks if it doesn't rain. You can begin mowing in the 4th week.

Buffalo grass can be seeded but it is not practical to use seed for St Augustine or zoysia grass.

Q. How can we protect our tomatoes from the birds? The woodpeckers are especially bad, but I have even seen mockingbirds and cardinals pecking at the fruit.

A. Yes, in some gardens can be a problem. Racoons, opossums, and rats can also seek a share of the fruit. It helps to prevent bird damage if you cover the fruit with bird netting. It also helps to pick the fruit when it reaches full size and shows a color change to yellow or the beginning of orange. The fruit will ripen in the house on the counter. Use a box trap to remove mammals that are a special problem.

Q. We are into butterflies and have been watching for porter weed at our favorite nursery. They report that the red and blue porter weed that you described as desirable are impossible to obtain because of the new demand. All they could get is the coral and one called medicinal porter weed. Are they worthwhile to plant?

A. I am trying them myself. The coral has a coarser foliage and the color of the flowers is less attractive than the red or blue but is acceptable to me if the hummingbirds and butterflies like it. We will see. The medicinal porter weed, has lots of names including Brazilian tea and Verbena cimmarona. It also comes in several colors. All supposedly provide nectar for butterflies.

Q. Should live oak trees be fertilized? When and with what?

A. If you fertilize your lawn your trees will benefit from the nutrients provided. Some gardeners provide their trees one cup of slow release lawn fertilizer 19-5-9 per inch of tree diameter spread over the drip line in early fall or February.

Q. How can we control the fire ants that are on our okra? Last year they ate flowers and made harvest unpleasant.

A. Fire ants are attracted to okra. Just before you harvest you can spray the ants off with a stream of water from the hose. Apply a bait like Amdro around the garden for long term control. There are also some organic fire ant baits that can be spread in the garden. Check the label.