

Gardening Q&A

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Q. Our purple martins have already fledged their babies. I thought the adults and juveniles had already left for their assembly points but they seem to be revisiting the houses for brief visits every day or every other day. Is that normal behavior?

A. Yes, they may keep that behavior up for several more weeks. I get impatient to lower the houses to minimize new sparrow nests but believe that this lingering behavior is important for encouraging the older pairs and this years young to select my houses next year .

Q. What tomato varieties should we use for the fall tomato crop? Am I correct in assuming it is time to plant the tomatoes for this fall?

A. Yes, it is best to plant the fall tomato plants in late July and early August so they can produce and ripen their fruit before the cold weather arrives. It is best to plant determinate heat setters in the fall. Look for Tycoon, Red Deuce, Celebrity, 602, 444, Valley Cat, Bobcat, HM 1623, and Sunbrite among the large-fruited varieties. For cherry tomatoes BHN 968 and Ruby Crush are desirable to plant. In early August some nurseries will have Surefire and -----Surprise. They produce tennis ball size fruit and are very quick to mature their fruit. Prepare the soil by adding 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow-release lawn fertilizer to every 100 sq. ft. of bed.

Q. We have old large live oak trees. They are generally healthy but some of the ball moss and dead wood is falling off. Could there be something wrong with them like a disease?

A. It is probably just the wind and rain we have experienced lately. Ball moss and the dead branches it grows on become more vulnerable to the wind after they go through a hot dry spell like we experienced this summer so far. They should be fine.

Q. We tested your theory that our Bermuda grass would green-up once the rains started if we let it go dormant by not watering it during the drought. It worked just as you said. Do we dare let it go dormant again, or is it best to only do it once per summer?

A. Maybe we will be lucky and we will get more rain for the rest of the summer than we did in May and July, but if it becomes dry again, you can let the grass go dormant again.

Q. What can we plant for hot weather color this summer? We noticed that with the drought our yard looks pretty dull.

A. There are lots of choices. In the shade plant penta, caladium, coleus blue plumbago, and begonia . In the sun use the annuals such as zinnias, cosmos, moss roses and purslane. For perennial color use blue plumbago, esperanza, firebush, thryallis, poinciana, and duranta.