Q&A

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Q. I saw a vine with lavender-blue flowers on a fence in a neighborhood where I was visiting. The leaves were heart-shaped but elongated towards the point. The flowers were orchid-like. Based on that description do you have any idea what it was?

A. The description sounds like sky vine, Thunbergia grandiflora. In addition to having an attractive bloom, the vine is drought tolerant and can easily cover a 10 feet tall fence or trellis, even though the top dies back every winter. It begins its growth in early summer but is at its best in late summer and the fall. New plants can be started with seed, layering, pieces of root, or cuttings.

Q. Please list some of the flowers that attract butterflies.

A. Mistflower, milkweed, passion-vine, zinnias, cosmos, citrus, coneflower, pentas, coreopsis, calendula, sunflower, salvia, and lantana all attract butterflies. It is relatively easy in South and Central Texas to have at least one butterfly attracting plant in bloom 12 months of the year.

Q. This fall we want to try and prevent the winter weeds from taking over our lawn and shrub border like they did last year. Our two main winter weeds are bedstraw and rescue grass. For good control of those two weeds do we have to use two pre-emergent herbicides, one for broadleaf weeds, and one for grassy weeds? When should they be applied? What about wildflowers, will the pre-emergent herbicide also prevent them from germinating?

A. Some pre-emergent herbicides to specialize in control of one or the other category of weeds, however, there are some products that will control both. Check the labels of Amaze, Dimension, Trimec, or XL to see if one of those dual control products will meet your needs.

Right now is the time to apply the pre-emergent herbicide to prevent winter weeds.

Yes, pre-emergent herbicides will prevent the germination of wildflowers that come up in the fall and bloom in the spring. The list includes bluebonnets, primrose, verbena, and poppies.

Q. Should the tomatoes be setting fruit yet? My plants are blooming heavily but I don’t see any fruit set yet?

A. There are reports that some of the heat-setters are setting fruit depending their size at planting, when they were planted and the microclimate of the garden where they are planted. After the cool spell we experienced 2 weeks ago more fruit set probably occurred. As the night-time temperatures fall the fruit will appear.

Q. Can the leaves that have fallen early from shade trees because of the dry weather be used as mulch?

A. Yes, leaves make excellent mulch. Live oak leaves are my favorite mulch for the vegetable garden. Leaves can also be used in the compost pile.