Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Bermuda grass is taking over my flower and vegetable gardens. I have tried to pull it out but it is impossible to get all of the root. We also tried a vinegar solution that killed the top (along with the adjacent flowers and vegetables). We would like to remain all organic but the Bermuda grass invasion is making me consider other options. What do you recommend?

A. Bermuda grass is a very persistent weed that is hard to control. I use the contact herbicides specific for grasses such as Ornamec, Over-the-Top, Poast, and Grass-be-Gone for flower gardens, groundcovers and the shrub border. If you follow the application instructions the contact herbicides mentioned kill the Bermuda grass, including the roots.

In the vegetable garden you can spray the grassy weeds after the crops are harvested or before they are planted. Review the label for the specific requirements. If vegetables are planted you may have to do the best you can do by pulling the weeds (including Bermuda grass) and then apply a mulch such as live oak leaves.

Q. We need to plant some shrubs and small trees. Which ones are deer proof and can grow in the shade?

A. There is a group of evergreen viburnums (tinus and Sandankwa) that prosper in the shade and are not eaten by deer. In my neighborhood Mexican plum tolerates shady conditions to produce a 15ft tree that deer do not eat. Standard pittosporum is another large shrub to consider. In some situations Turk’s cap and shrimp plant will grow and bloom in the shade without being eaten by deer. Primrose jasmine is a much surer choice.

Q. My tomatoes look pretty good but they have a very tough texture that makes them unpleasant to eat. I don’t think it is the varieties because my neighbor used the same Tycoon and Celebrities. They are firm but not grisly! Any ideas?

A. You may want to review your neighbor’s cultural practices and duplicate them. I do have one reasonable guess though. The problem could be stink bugs. There are many species of stink bug including the leaf-footed bug. The stink bugs inject there digestive juice into the tomato and then consume the resultant “stew”. They travel in large groups and will make many injections. The net result is a bumpy fruit with a coarse texture. The fruit can be eaten but are not as tasty as stink- bug sting- free fruit. Stink bugs are difficult to control. If I see them on peaches, tomatoes, blackberries or other fruit, I apply Sevin spray.

Q. We were at a party the other day and saw some beautiful flowers blooming on stalks. The owner called them “glads”. Are you familiar with them? Are they hard to grow?

A. Gladiolus do produce a beautiful flower in every color you can think of. They are usually used for cut flowers. Plant the bulbs in February in a raised bed garden with 8 inches between the bulbs. They send up iris- like leaf-spikes. In my garden they return every year. Up north they remove the bulbs after they brown and replant each year.