

Plant Q & A

Submitted by Forrest Appleton

01. Question: *I have tomatoes in a 30 gal container with holes drilled in bottom. I water every other day. My highly intelligent neighbor says I should only water once a week. Is my neighbor really intelligent about tomatoes?*

Answer: *I wouldn't know about your neighbor. If the tomato doesn't need watering more than once a week, then he would be right. However, you cannot put a time on this. You should water your plant thoroughly (until water runs out the bottom of the container) and then do not water again until the soil feels dry to the touch when you stick your finger in it about 2 inches deep.*

02. Question: *The pods now hanging from my new Mountain laurel tree, clusters of these pods, do I remove them or let them remain? And also what about the on pods on Esperanzas?*

Answer: *The only advantage to clipping off the mountain laurel seed pods is ascetics. They will persist on the tree for a year or more and the tree looks better without them. If you do clip them off, put them in your garbage for disposal as they are toxic. You should keep the bean pods clipped from the Esperanza as this will promote more blossoms.*

03. Question: *I have 2 flower beds in which I want to remove the Asiatic Jasmine ground cover and replace with rock. What is the best way to remove the jasmine without damaging any of the other trees or shrubs in these beds?*

Answer: *The Asiatic Jasmine has a shallow root system. This plant is very difficult to kill with herbicides because of its waxy leaf. The best way to remove it is to take a square spade, sharpen the edge like a hoe, and slip this just under the soil surface and cut the jasmine roots. You can then roll it up like an old rug to dispose of it.*

04. Question: *Is there a variety of St Augustine that is very shade tolerant? I have a very shady yard but would like to have some grass in it.*

Answer: *All cultivars of St. Augustine grass have more shade tolerance than other available turf grass choices for your area. However, none are tolerant to heavy shade.*

05. Question: *Where is the best place to plant my two fire bush and how should I do it?*

Answer: *A spot in full sunlight is the best for the Fire Bush. Just dig a hole, install the plant at the same level as currently growing and back fill with the soil you removed from the hole. Water thoroughly and then do not water again until the soil in the root ball feels dry to the touch when you stick your finger into it about an inch deep.*

06. Question: *I have tried in vain to get help for 3 years! Our lawn is St Augustine & for the past 3 years it has grown fairly well except it tends to grow stalks in some areas rather than healthy blades. I have taken stalks to local nurseries for some explanation but no one has been able to help! It looks great right after it's mowed but within days the ugly stalks return.*

Answer: *I'm not sure what these stalks are but suspect that they are seed heads. Sometimes St. Augustine grass will produce these seed heads. They are not all that common and I had trouble even finding an image of them. If this is what you have, I know of no way to prevent them. Perhaps more frequent mowing would keep them from being so offensively visible.*

07. Question: *Why is the bark on my live oak trees sloughing off in large pieces?*

Answer: *The sloughing of the bark is a tell tale symptom of the fungal disease Hypoxylon Canker for which there is no cure. This disease only attacks stressed trees and drought stress is the most common.*

08. Question: *I have 2 whiskey barrels that I am looking for a good plant to place in them that will not die and have to be replaced each year. I put a purple fountain grass last year, which I loved but it did not come back after winter. I need something with about 4ft height when full grown.*

Answer: *Why don't you consider a rose such as 'Belinda's Dream'.*

09. Question: *My 4 sago palms have always sprouted new growth at the same time. This year 3 sprouted new growth but the largest one did not. Is this telling me that there is a problem?*

Answer: *I don't think so. It may be developing a flower instead of putting on a new group of fronds.*

10. Question: *We have 6 Firebush planted here at my workplace and 3 of them look as if they are dying or have some kind of disease. I noticed a weird looking bug on the healthy bushes and what seems to be a sticky substance. There is also a sticky substance on the diseased bushes. Is there some kind of mite that may have gotten to them? Can you recommend a spray that may help? I would hate to lose these plants and they are usually very hardy and attract a lot of butterflies and hummingbirds.*

Answer: *If you will closely check the new growth of the firebush on the underside of the leaves you will find many small insects called aphids. It is their excrement that is the sticky substance on the upper side of the leaves under them. Spraying with most any insecticide will control them. You may need to do it several times to completely rid the plants of them. Be sure to direct the spray to the underside of the leaves. Your favorite nursery/garden center personnel can recommend a brand.*

11. Question: *Do English cucumbers have male & female flowers on the same plant, or two separate plants?*

Answer: *All members of the cucumber (*Curcumas sativus*) have male and female flowers on the same plant. Many times they will begin flowering with flowers of only one sex but will soon have both.*

12. Question: *I have a 20 year old crepe myrtle that did not put out any leaves this year. I planned to cut it down, but as I was trimming away, I saw that the main trunk and branches have green bark and the branches are supple. Only the last 12-24 inches of twiggy branches are totally dry and dead. Is there any hope for this tree to survive the summer and releaf next year?*

Answer: *Where there is green wood, there is a glimmer of hope. However, the fact that it hasn't leafed out would indicate that the tree is badly stressed from the drought and even if it survives it will be marginal and complete recovery could take years.*