

PLANT QUESTIONS

My impatiens have deposits of "salts" on the stems. Is this natural?

These are most likely grains of sugar or salt secreted by aphids. Use a general-purpose insecticide and insure complete coverage. That should eliminate your grain problem.

We want to add more Texas sage in our landscape. What do you recommend?

Lynn's Legacy cenizo is a compact plant that slowly grows to five or six feet. The foliage is silver, but the most distinctive characteristic is that the flowers are more blue than other selections.

Now that the purple martins have left can we lower our martin houses and block the entry holes to prevent more English sparrow nesting?

Yes, if you have not seen any martin residents or visitors for the last two weeks it is time to lower the houses and clean out the apartments.

If you have gardening or landscaping questions we have the answers. Just ask any of the friendly, knowledgeable, and experienced nursery staff at Milberger's Nursery.



Black Stocking napier grass has been given the distinction of the newest Texas Superstar™ plant in recognition of its resilience in hot, dry conditions and striking presence and broad use in the landscapes of South Central Texas. ~Texas A&M AgriLife photo by Mike Arnold

A BRAND NEW SUPERSTAR™

Black Stocking Napier Grass

By Adam Russell, Texas A&M AgriLife

Black Stocking napier grass, the newest Texas Superstar™ plant, grows fast and tall and provides a variety of uses in Texas Landscapes. Black Stockings has beautiful, wide deep purple leaves, which reflex on a vase-shaped plant that stands out in most landscapes.

"It's not a flowering plant, but commands attention in landscapes," said Brent Pemberton, Ph.D., AgriLife Research ornamental specialist, "it is similar in appearance to Princess Caroline napier grass but grows much taller. Plants grow to 8-12 feet tall, depending on the amount of watering and growing season length."

(MORE NAPIER GRASS ON PAGE THREE)

WATER SAVER LANDSCAPES

Replace Your Lawn with Native Plants

By Gail Gallegos, SAWS Conservation Consultant

Central Texas is a semi-arid climate with hot, dry summers. Yet, the grasses that dominate our lawns are adapted in moist, warm climates. By converting your lawn, you're choosing a landscape that's more appropriate for our local climate. Replacing some or all of your lawn with beautiful native WaterSaver landscaping plants is an easy and effective way to reduce your water use, save money and create a more interesting yard. When maintained effectively, a WaterSaver landscape can reduce your outdoor water use by up to 50%. Converting even a small portion of your lawn to drought tolerant plants can add up to significant water savings.

If you're having trouble growing grass on thin soils, shady areas, steep slopes, or any other hard-to-water places, then remove the grass and replace it with low-maintenance WaterSaver landscaping. Enjoy your yard more, maintain it less. A grass lawn offers little for butterflies, bees and birds. Who can resist the popping reds of Turk's cap, the contrast of purple Mexican bush sage with yellow copper canyon daisy, or the pink on the autumn sage? These and other hardy, native plants add beauty, color and nourishment for pollinators.

Replacing shallow-rooted turf grasses like zoysia and St. Augustine grass with deeper-rooted native and perennial plants produces healthier soil that absorbs more water and creates less run-off.



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Our Writers have the answers: **Dr. Jerry Parsons** is a well renown Horticulture Specialist who is retired from the Texas AgriLife Extension Service in San Antonio; **Dr. Calvin Finch** is the retired Director of Water Conservation and Technology at the Texas A&M University System. The Gardening Newsletter for South Central Texas is edited by **Marc Hess** at mhess@hctc.coop.

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A BRAND NEW SUPERSTAR™

Black Stockings Napier Grass

(CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE)

“Black Stockings can be used as a standalone specimen plant or to accent mixed borders, and can serve as a fast-growing screen or background plant,” he said. “Full sun exposure is best for leaf color development.”

“Black Stockings is very heat and drought tolerant and can be perennial in some portions of Texas,” Pemberton said. “Plants also can be perennial further north if planted in a protected location, but it is typically considered an annual in North Texas and the High Plains.”

“Black Stockings is best planted in the spring to ensure good establishment by summer,” he said. “It can be planted in summer from large containers but will require more water until the plant establishes. The amount of water the plant receives heavily influences its rate of growth and eventual



Black Stockings are a striking addition to landscapes as a screen, background to provide contrast to flowering ornamentals or as a standalone plant. They handle Texas summers well and require very little attention and minimal care.

~ Texas A&M AgriLife photo by Mike Arnold

“The plants are very fast growing so they perform well as an annual. Whether it’s one season or multiple seasons, *Black Stockings napier grass* is a good addition to landscapes as a screen or border plant that can be used to accentuate other ornamentals and add depth to the design.”

~ Brent Pemberton, Ph.D., AgriLife Research Ornamental Specialist

height, but Black Stockings can get by on very little water in summer conditions.”

“Plants are adapted to any well drained soil,” Pemberton said. “Very little fertilizer is needed for the plant to perform well, and nitrogen fertilizer causes leaves to green up and lose their striking purple color.”

“Fertilizer is really not necessary,” he said. “If you use it, it doesn’t take much and it’s best to go with a product that is light on nitrogen if you want that bold, purple color.”

Black Stockings is not as cold hardy as Princess Caroline but is resistant to leaf spot that can be seen in older varieties.

Cut dead plant vegetation back to the ground after fall frost and plants will make rapid growth in the spring in milder areas of the state.

SUMMER PESTS

Mosquitos: Masters of Misery

By Mark Peterson, SAWS Conservation Project Coordinator

Stop swatting and start enjoying your great outdoors. Use these methods to help prevent these biting bloodsuckers from hanging around. All the weeks of drought-busting rain showers this spring have been great for landscapes and wildflowers. But they've also ushered in an unwelcome pest: mosquitos by the millions.

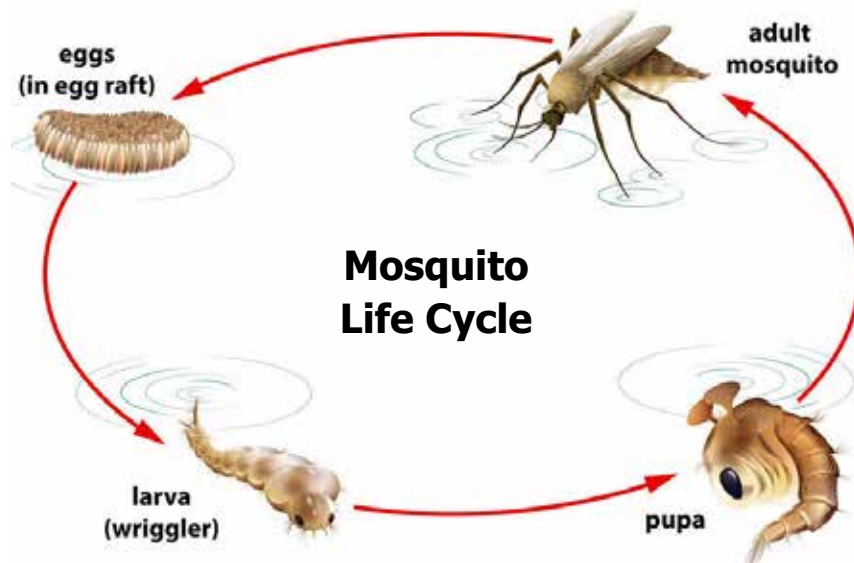
Many myths surround the management of mosquitos. Bat houses were often built in and around San Antonio in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But bats seldom, if ever, eat mosquitos. And while birds, like marlins and red-wing blackbirds, do a better job, dragonflies and damselflies actually are the best predators of mosquitos. They're voracious consumers of both adult and juvenile mosquitos.

So, how can we prevent these masters of misery from hanging around?

- **Eliminate ALL standing water.** A tablespoon of water can breed mosquitos. All cups, saucers on the bottom of pots,

gutters, old terracotta pots, depressions in rocks or cement should be eliminated or cleaned and put away.

- **Clean bird baths or wildlife water features often.** Small amounts of chlorine, strong vinegar, or tablets of *Bacillus thurengiensis israelensis* will prevent the breeding of mosquitos.



Eggs are laid one at a time or attached together to form "rafts." They float on the surface of the water.

The **larva** lives in the water and comes to the surface to breathe. Larvae shed (molt) their skins four times, growing larger after each molt. Most larvae have siphon tubes for breathing and hang upside down from the water surface.

The **pupal stage** is a resting, non-feeding stage of development, but pupae are mobile, responding to light changes and moving (tumble) with a flip of their tails towards the bottom or protective areas.

The newly emerged **adult** rests on the surface of the water for a short time to allow itself to dry and all its body parts to harden. The wings have to spread out and dry properly before it can fly. Blood feeding and mating does not occur for a couple of days after the adults emerge.

How long each stage lasts depends on both temperature and species characteristics. Some species have naturally adapted to go through their entire life cycle in as little as four days or as long as one month.

- **Add fish to your ponds.** They feast on mosquito larvae.
- **Remove tall vegetation** to promote air circulation and sunshine. Air circulation encourages drying and predators.
- **Plant bee balm, rosemary and mint** and run through them every day.
- **Finally, DEET is still the most effective product by far in preventing mosquito bites.** But rather than cloaking myself in manufactured chemicals, I prefer to dab essential oils on my ear lobes, neck, wrists and ankles.

COLOR FROM NOW UNTIL FROST

Plant Zinnias for Mounds of Color

By Robert Burns, Texas A&M AgriLife Research

Zinnias are very colorful plants that have all the fall colors you like to see in your garden beds: oranges, apricots and yellows. Fall zinnias and chrysanthemums have similar attributes and can be used in much the same ways but whereas chrysanthemums may only flower for several weeks, and then only if the weather is cool, fall zinnias tolerate Texas heat well and will display color until the first frost, if properly watered and fertilized.

You can also get Zinnias in large containers that can be used as patio plants. They're fun to use in

“Zinnias are one of the best annual flowers for use in San Antonio. They are colorful, attract butterflies and are not eaten by the deer. Some of the selections make good xeriscape plants and some are wonderful cut flowers.”

~ Dr. Calvin Finch

mixed containers with other plants for fall, such as ornamental grasses or ornamental peppers.



Zinnias like these Marylandica “Zahara Starlight Rose” can be a colorful and long-lasting addition to your flower garden. Add this popular annual to sunny areas of your landscape that can benefit from their perky blooms. The Marylandica types of Zinnias form disease-resistant “mounds of color,” lasting until frost when planted in late summer.

Gardeners can pinch off or prune young plants of the standard types to encourage bushiness, but this is not required for the newer types. Placing the plants so they get good air circulation or flow will further help prevent fungal leaf diseases.

Zinnias bloom more proficiently in full sun. They need full sunlight for a half day or more, and will thrive as long as they have moderate water and are planted in a well-drained site or container. Zinnias are big attractions for pollinators, such as bees and butterflies.

Many varieties of zinnia are available now and can be planted throughout the summer as late as August, resulting in a bright show of color for the fall and until the first frost.

A visit to Milberger’s Nursery will help keep your summer landscape full of color. You will find healthy plant stock that is selected to thrive throughout our South Central Texas summers. You will also find the good advice and creative suggestions for your specific landscape and gardening needs. To see what is on sale each week visit our web site at www.milbergernursery.com

TREES AND SHRUBS

Have Patience with Your Palms

By Mark Peterson, SAWS Conservation Project Coordinator

There's no magic potion to increase survival of frost-intolerant, heat-loving plants. Instead, be patient and know how to recognize signs of survival. A couple months ago I recommended patience and leaving certain plants alone. This included palms and sagos as well as heat-loving plants like esperanza, firebush and Pride of Barbados.

Initially I estimated 90 percent of Mexican fan palms and 70 percent of sago palms would die, but it now appears that many Mexican fan palms and sagos survived – more than 50 percent of them, to be exact. And that's great news. Patience does pay off.

Unfortunately, there's not much you can do to increase survival of frost intolerant, heat-loving plants. Nor are there concoctions, powders or spells

you can apply. You must have patience and wait. Then, know what to look for.

When a palm shows green at the very top or green sprouts at the base in the woody plants, provide a moderate amount of water on a regular basis and a small amount of organic fertilizer that incorporates micro-nutrients like iron, manganese and magnesium.

Be careful not to overwater. The quickest way to kill palms and other heat-tolerant woody perennials is by giving them too much water.

Eventually your palms will return to full beauty. It may take about six to eight months, but have patience and they'll likely rebound.



If you're looking for a tall—up to 100 feet—palm tree that will deliver a distinctive tropical look, you are looking for a **Mexican Fan Palm**. A native to northern Mexico this palm will tolerate freezing temperatures but only to about 20°, maybe 15° and thrives in and around the Southwest in local city landscapes. Palms will live for 80 or 100 years if conditions are right.



Use **Sago Palms** as backdrops to smaller plants or shrubs in your beds. Sago palms are not really palms rather they are cycads, a group of seed plants related to cone-bearing conifers in Japan and the Pacific. When grown outdoors they may reach a height of 10 to 12 feet, though the ones I see in South Texas about five feet tall. ~Grechen Heber Photo

For a more extensive list of native shrubs that will thrive in South Central Texas' unique landscapes visit our web site www.MilbergerNursery.com. Under the GARDEN CENTER tab choose the drop down that says TREES AND SHRUBS. Of course, you can always ask one of the south Texas tree experts next time you visit the nursery.

JULY GARDENING TIPS

Gardening in the Heat of Summer

By Dr. Jerry Parsons

Plant: For summer color and fall beauty, plant Texas' tough annuals and heat-loving tropicals in beds and containers. To brighten a landscape in the heat of the summer, plant lantana, bougainvillea, mandevilla vine, allamanda, hibiscus, salvia, periwinkle, marigold, zinnia, portulaca, purslane, copper plant, and Bush Morning Glory.

Prune: Roses (except climbing varieties) should be pruned early August to insure fall bloom. Remove one third of the bush with old canes, dead canes, spent bloom stems comprising the majority removed. This will stimulate vigorous new growth and abundant fall blooms.

Keep tree pruning to a minimum during summer, especially on oaks.

Fertilize hanging baskets and other containerized plants regularly with a water-soluble fertilizer. If you failed to make a second application of fertilizer to your lawn in June and moisture is available, do so now.

On the Lookout: Insects to watch for include white flies, spider mites, webworms, tent

caterpillars, aphids and grasshoppers. Symptoms of chinch bug damage can appear anytime in healthy St. Augustine lawns. Look for dry, burned-looking patches in the hottest parts of the lawn. Control with any contact insecticide.

Trees and shrubs may experience some leaf drop this time of year, caused by summer's heat and dry weather stress. There is nothing which can be done except mulch and hope for cooler weather. Fall webworms may appear on pecan, mulberry, ash, persimmon, and other trees.

Odd Jobs: Give special attention to water requirement of leafy garden plants such as coleus, caladiums and elephant ears during hot, sunny periods.

Mulch heavily. Maintain a heavy (two to four inches) mulch throughout your landscape and gardens to reduce water needs and eliminate weeding. Water plants when needed and not according to the calendar or day of the week. Water (soak) thoroughly rather than applying frequent light sprinklings.

For more detailed and complete Gardening Tips for this month visit www.milbergernursery.com.

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Gold Star Esperanza or **Texas Yellow-Bells** is an evergreen shrub that produces striking golden-yellow, bell-shaped flowers from spring through frost. It practically laughs at the full-sun heat in July and August. Gold Star Esperanza is great for tropical settings in containers and in the garden. It attracts pollinators including butterflies, hummingbirds, and bees. Occasional deadheading will help keep the plant clean as well as promoting additional flowering although it is not a requirement as it will continue to produce when left to its own. That is why it has been designated a Texas SuperStar™ plant.

