

*I bought the most beautiful Bougainvillea hanging basket but cannot get it to rebloom very well. I water and fertilize regularly and it gets plenty of sun. Does it need to be repotted or is there a trick to making them bloom better?*

If your Bougainvillea basket is hanging in full sun, it sounds like you may be giving it too much TLC or applying a fertilizer with too much nitrogen. Bougainvillea responds much better to abuse than the average summer heat-lover. They like to be root-bound, so don't be anxious about repotting it. Most nursery professionals would tell you to use a Bougainvillea or Hibiscus fertilizer to make your basket bloom. While I recommend these products for normal use, there is a method I have used for several years that has never failed to produce an abundance of colorful bracts. Start by purchasing a high-phosphorous water-soluble fertilizer. These typically have an analysis of 12-55-6 or 9-59-8. Withhold water until the Bougainvillea gets significantly wilted, but not to the point that the leaves dry out and become crisp. This may only take a couple days in our summer heat. When the plant is heavily wilted, water using the label recommended rate of high-phosphorous fertilizer solution. Repeat this process two more times. After the third stress-and-fertilize cycle, begin watering with clear water at normal intervals. Every other day is probably often enough. Just make sure your watering frequency allows the soil to dry from the previous irrigation before watering again. Within a couple weeks your basket will have more color than when you bought it. Now you can begin using a Bougainvillea-specific fertilizer every 3-4 weeks. Shape as needed because Bougainvillea blooms on new growth. Bougainvillea planted in the landscape should not be pruned or fertilized late in the growing season to help harden-off the plant before winter.

*I really like the look of Canna Lilies, but find them to be invasive. Can you suggest a way to keep them confined to where I plant them?*

Unfortunately, the only way to keep Cannas from spreading beyond your desired location is to dig and divide them. But there are a couple of things you can do to make this task easier. If you want to plant Cannas in a single spot in your flower bed this is a good opportunity to recycle a used nursery pot. I have taken a large nursery pot, buried it in my landscape where I wanted my Cannas, then filled the pot with soil and planted the Cannas in the center of the buried pot. When I saw the expanded clump of Cannas pushing heavily on all sides of the buried pot, I knew it was time to dig and divide. The buried pot kept the Cannas from multiplying beyond what I could control. I have also used them in a linear pattern by using a buried length of metal landscape edging on both sides of my planting, connecting at the ends. Over time you may get some "escapes" that grow under the edging or the edging may weaken with age, but it keeps them in check for a few years and makes digging and dividing easier.

*With the drought we had this summer, the only thing in my landscape that thrived was nutgrass. I tried pulling it at first but it has continued to spread. How do I get this out of my lawn without killing my grass?*

A wise woman who taught me much in my horticultural life once told me the only way to get rid of nutgrass was to call your real estate agent and move. With the housing market being what it is, thankfully there are now more cost-effective means of control. While commonly called nutgrass, nutsedge is the more precise term. Good cultural practices are

the best means of controlling nutsedge in turf. Regular watering, fertilization, and preemergent herbicide applications, along with proper mowing height all help establish healthy turf which makes it difficult for nutsedge to compete in the lawn. Although commercially available preemergent herbicides are not labeled for control of nutsedge, they control other weed species which compete for the water and nutrients available for your lawn. Nutsedge will inevitably find a spot or two in your yard where it can grow, flourishing under adverse conditions. Trying to pull up nutsedge often breaks it off at soil level, leaving the tubers and rhizomes of the root system intact to multiply and return. It can be dug up to ensure the entire removal of the weed, but this is far more time and labor intensive than using a simple chemical control. The best and easiest way to control nutsedge is by using a herbicide called SedgeHammer™. SedgeHammer™ will not hurt your lawn if used according to label specifications and provides excellent control. After applying SedgeHammer™ (along with a surfactant), it takes about 10-14 days before the weed will turn yellow - so be patient. Complete kill can take 3-4 weeks. Evaluate the need for a second application when you can clearly see the yellowing or browning from the first application. If you have new patches of healthy nutsedge, a second application will usually be all you need for complete control in otherwise healthy turf.

*I decided to grow tomatoes for the first time this year. I have 2 plants in large pots that have continued to produce, even through the summer heat. It does not seem to be killing the plants but many of the leaves have squiggly lines on them. What is causing this?*

Vegetable leafminers are the larvae from a species of fly that feed on the tissue between the upper and lower leaf surface of tomatoes and other vegetables. When the eggs hatch, the larvae “mine” snake-like feeding tunnels through the leaf which are narrow at the egg end and widen as the larvae develop. These pests usually do not cause more than aesthetic damage but heavy infestations can cause numerous leaves to die which can slow plant growth and yield or may cause sunscald on the fruit. The damage to the leaf tissue also creates a potential entry point for bacterial or fungal disease pathogens. Whenever possible, I try to avoid pesticide applications on edibles by picking off the affected leaves. When infestations reach levels where this is no longer practical, organic insecticides containing neem oil or Spinosad are an effective control and most are safe to apply up to the day of harvest. For best results, spray every 2 weeks rotating between neem oil and Spinosad. This rotation may be used preventatively and will also help control worms, thrips, and other vegetable pests.

*I have Sago Palms that look sick. The fronds are yellowing and they have white flakes on the leaves that look like drops of paint. Is this some kind of disease and how do I cure it?*

It sounds like you’ve got cycad scale. This is becoming more prevalent and has led to quarantines in Texas nurseries in recent years. This is a sucking insect that can do significant damage to your Sago Palm if not caught and controlled quickly. Environmentally friendly products like Ultra-Fine Oil™ or Bonide All Seasons Horticultural Oil™ can be used to control scale but should not be used when temperatures will reach 90° or higher. Since we are in the heat of summer, I recommend using a liquid drench insecticide containing the active ingredient Imidicloprid. These products are usually labeled as tree & shrub insecticides and are mixed with water then poured around the base of the plant. This method only requires one application and provides excellent

season-long control. If you prefer a spray application, using any liquid insecticide containing Acephate, Acetamiprid, Imidicloprid or Malathion will prove effective in one or two applications.