

Ask The Plant Groom(tm) by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom(tm)

QA1090

For years I have listened to your radio programs when I could get them or read your articles. I even have one of your books but this is an URGENT REQUEST. Our 39 year old son died on March 5 from a massive heart attack and multiple strokes. Very sudden and a more than devastating experience.

We received 2 gorgeous gardenia bushes in memorial and I immediately planted them in very large containers and they have enjoyed being outside all this time. NOW with our north Texas winter fast approaching, I am not sure what to do with them to keep them alive. We are on the OK/TX border 140 miles west of Dallas and 50 miles west of Wichita Falls and our winters can be brutal because of our hard winds. We have been known to be 10-15 below zero with a blasting wind from the north.

One of the plants leaves are turning yellow and dropping even though nothing has changed with it's care. That makes me think that maybe they are suppose to loose their leaves in the winter. They are huge but I did think ahead and put them on rollers so I can move them into somewhere if I need to. Where is the question. I need to know what conditions will keep them going through the winter. A garage or not?

It is so very important that these plants not die as it would be like loosing our sweet Cary all over again. I don't constantly get to read any articles from you so can you make an exception and e-mail me back. I know you are super busy and can't make exceptions on a regular basis but this is so important to us. We have already had very cool temps and down to about 40 degrees so our annual freeze is coming.

I know I am asking for something special and I want to thank you in advance for anything you can tell me to help me keep Cary's tributes going. We are late 50's me and early 60's my husband and there is nothing on earth like loosing your sweet son and having to deal with it day in and day out. No parent that has not gone through it can even imagine how horrible it is. Anyway, thanks in advance for anything you can do to help me keep my gardenias alive. - I. N.

Being a parent of a 34 year old son, 32 and 21 years old daughters I can't even imagine what you and your husband are going through. I'm sorry to hear of your loss.

You are located in a plant hardiness zone where the historically recorded low temperatures are 0 - 5 degrees F. These temperatures are not favorable for any gardenias to survive your winters. Because of the average low temperature in your area I do not recommend planting gardenias a permeant landscape shrubs.

Your best option is to grow these as containerized seasonal plants. Plastic, ceramic, terra cotta, wood or any other container material is acceptable as long as they drain well. Measure the container's width and add two inches to this measurement and secure or build one of this width. An example' if these are currently in a 10" container move them into a 12' container. Use lightweight potting media when repotting and do this now.

Be sure to have a location selected that will reach no lower than 32 degrees F during the winter and is bright. A greenhouse or sunny garden room should work well. Water as needed to keep the root system moist. Do not keep the soil wet or dry. Moist is the key.

All gardenias have leaves that turn yellow and drop from time to time. There may be several after repotting but don't be alarmed. When the soil is kept wet these beauties will drop several leaves after turning yellow.

Plant dollies you purchase or construct for large plants is always a good idea. This allows large and/or heavy plants to be moved like furniture on wheels.

These plants will not do well in dark locations such as a garage. They do best in green house environments through the winter.

Good luck with your project. I wish you and your family all the best.

I have a lot of stickers in my yard that come out every fall. I have heard that you can fertilize and kill them but I have no idea what kind of fertilizer or if this even works. Thanks. C. S.

Stickers, grass burs, sand burs and other names for these weedy pests may be controlled by a thick, healthy and vigorous lawn.

Thick lawns are accomplished by providing the cultural requirement your lawn needs to reach this status. Supplying required nutrients to the soil, watering when needed and mowing frequently are the three major components of quality lawn care. A soil test will let you know what nutrients your soil needs. An easy way to accomplish this is contact the county office of your Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas A & M University System Agent's office, go by for a visit, secure the sample containers, plus instructions for the test. Secure the soil samples as per instructions and send it or them to the lab ... now. Note: the address on where to send the sample is on the sample containers as well as the instruction sheet.

My office will also mail these to you FREE if you will send me a long self addressed envelope with two 1st class stamps on it along with your request to; Dale Groom, Soil Test Kit, 10056 Marsh Lane, Suite B-101, Dallas, TX 75229.

After receiving your test results do follow their suggestions. When water is needed apply deeply and thoroughly. Do Not irrigate by some predetermined schedule. Mow frequently. Frequent mowing is the single most important mechanical activity we can do to, the density of turf.

Fertilizing according to soil test results and recommendations, irrigating when needed and mowing frequently will control ... stickers.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist, Master Gardener Program Coordinator-Dallas County, Texas Cooperative Extension, Texas A & M University System, Native Texan, Columnist, Radio/TV Host, Author is also known statewide as The Plant Groom(tm). You may send your lawn garden, landscape or other horticultural questions to Dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net. To speak directly with a Master Gardener FREE M - F, 8:30a - 4p dial 214-904-3053.

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