

Ask A Master Gardener (AAMG) Questions and Answers

Whenever we receive questions, we like to share them and our answers to help others who may have similar issues. Note: the photos referenced in Questions 1 are not available for posting here. However, it is always a great idea to send photos of the issue your plants are having to aid in finding an appropriate response. If you have a question of your own, contact us via our website at: www.netmga.net

Question 1: *I am concerned about my tree and surrounding trees that could become infected. I am submitting a photo of the top part of a pine that looks dead. Is there a certified and trusted arborist who can check this tree for winter kill, fungi, or insect infestation? Meanwhile, what is your opinion? The tree is healthy except for top 5 feet. We purchased our house with these 40-50 feet pines several years ago. I would estimate these pines are 20 or more years old. I guessed they were Norwegian pine but included a pic of the needles. As I took the next set of pictures, I noticed spittle on branches from spittle bug, but do not know if this is a contributing factor. And yes, the hard frost killed our sturdy and rather large butterfly bush. So not surprised about killing new growth on the pine. However...one pine top and not others..... Thank you.*

AAMG: Based on the picture you sent this identifies as a Nootka Cypress tree. After looking around various state agriculture extension sites, this dieback could be caused by a couple of issues.

First, since there is no dieback on the other trees, there may be some kind of girdling in that treetop. This could be brought on by a tree ID tag wire being left on the tree or some kind of damage encircling the treetop.

Second, this problem could have been caused by a fungus in the Diplodia family of fungi. This is a problem for cypress trees that are out of their native areas. This tree is native to the Pacific northwest, and they have different growing conditions than we do here. Here is the website that where this information can be found: <https://www.purduelandscapereport.org/article/nootka-falsecypress-dieback-problems/>

You may want to keep an eye on the adjacent trees to see if the condition spreads. Then you would have a better idea as to the problem. You can also get back with us anytime if you like.

Question 2: *I have allowed my loropetalum shrubs to become way too large (5-6 feet tall) and then following the hard freeze last Christmas I thought they had died. Now they have come back (mostly). My question is: I would like to cut them way back to 2-3 feet. When can I do that? I know they were badly stressed following the freeze and I don't want to kill them by stressing them out too much again. Thanks for your help!*

AAMG: Loropetalum is a spring flowering shrub that should be pruned after flowering. So now is a good time to do your pruning, if it has finished flowering. Here is more information on this plant from Clemson Cooperative Extension: <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/loropetalum/>

Here is a publication from the University of Tennessee/Tennessee State University (UT/TSU) Extension to help you determine how much and where to prune your shrubs. “Best Management Practices for Pruning Landscape Trees, Shrubs and Ground Covers,”

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/PB1619.pdf>

Also here is a UT/TSU gardening calendar to help maintain other plants in your garden.

“Tennessee Home Fruit and Vegetable Garden 2023 Calendar,”

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W436.pdf>

Question 3: *I have a small raised bed garden planted with leeks this year. After they are harvested can I replant them in the same space next year or do they need to be rotated?*

AAMG: We always recommend rotating plants year to year in a home garden. You can replant them in the same space next year but we would recommend adding a small amount of fertilizer or even well composted organic material over the winter between harvest and planting. The plants this year will take the nutrients they need from the soil, keeping them from next year’s crop. Replenishing these nutrients will certainly help next year’s crop. Here is a link to information from the University of Minnesota to help you when or if you want to add fertilizer to your raised bed:

<https://extension.umn.edu/vegetables/growing-leeks#soil-testing-and-fertilizer-233960>. Also see University of Tennessee/Tennessee State University publication D127,

“Onions, Leeks and Shallots for the Tennessee Garden” for your future reference:

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/D127.pdf>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, “ASK A MASTER GARDENER” to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.