



Southern California Horticultural Society – October 2020 Webinar Questions

This month, the Southern California Horticultural Society invited Florence Nishida, M.S., a Research Associate at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and co-founder of the non-profit [L.A. Green Grounds](#), to present a webinar on how to grow Asian vegetables.

These are Florence's answers to questions we were unable to answer live. If you wish to contact her with further questions, please email Florence at growtips@gmail.com.

To watch the full replay of Florence's presentation, visit <https://youtu.be/8tco9QCGqCM>.

1. Where can you get Mitsuba seeds?

I never used seeds. I bought 2 tiny plants from Nijiya Market, put them in water when I got home. They were raised hydroponically, it appears, as their roots were in a square of sponge material. I then carefully removed the sponge, kept them in water for about 2 days, then planted each one in separate pots <4 inches, watered them carefully (not drenched), and in about a week, they took hold, grew tiny new leaf buds. I kept them growing in the pots, giving each a weak solution of fish extract/kelp extract after about 3 weeks, and eventually planted them into my garden bed. I was so happy! They were expensive in the store - \$1.99 per plant!

2. Should container soil be changed out periodically? Or do you just continue to add compost to the container?

Depends on the size of the pot, i.e, volume of potting soil. I would usually toss out the old potting soil (into my compost pile), and fill the pot with fresh potting soil. If it's a very large pot (e.g. 24"), dump out about half the soil (bottom half if you can), fill up the pot again with fresh potting soil, mixing very well. Add a bit of home made compost (if you have it) into the tops 8", and mix in well.

3. Can you give some advice about growing ginger and/or turmeric — they don't seem to do well for me in pots during winter (too cold?)

I have turmeric growing now, in a shallow pot (about 4" deep and I water carefully, keeping it moist but not drenching wet. It's in my garage by the west facing window – but with trees outside. Both turmeric and ginger are warm, tropical region plants, so you need to keep it from getting too cold, especially with wet soil. I tried bringing it outside where it got hit by sunlight, and the sides of the leaves started to curl, so I



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brought it in again. Bright light is good, but not hot direct sunlight. And when it becomes cold, put it in a moderately warm place.

4. What can I plant with my brassicas to deter pests? Any good companion plants?

Companion plant planting is a nice idea but doesn't really work all that well. Consider: if the target insects are attracted to the odor of certain plant families – like the Brassicas – they may want to feed on several of your Brassicas. The idea of planting a lure of a plant, to draw the pests away from your desired plant, actually may draw more of those pests to your garden. Just deal with the pests case by case, on the particular plants. I plant 'Green Glaze' collards because compared to other brassicas, the Bagrada bug seems to not attack it in large numbers. In the end, it's your vigilance that matters. Squash those bugs at your first sighting.

5. How do you keep birds (esp. White-crowned Sparrows) off snap peas and tender greens?

Try bird netting. But you must have the netting a few inches away from the peas – use poles to push it away. Otherwise, the birds peck through the openings of the netting. Other tender greens, you may need to make a hoop house – something that arches over the bed, that you could put netting over. But once the plants grow tall, they'll be near those openings. Scarecrows and CD discs don't work. Exclusion is the only thing that does.

6. Is it possible to grow edible mushrooms in Southern California?

I hope so. I am thinking of making a class on growing mushrooms in the garden, next spring. Just keep an eye on our website: lagreengrounds.org if I do a class like that – we'll announce.

7. My tatsoi gets eaten so quickly by the bugs before the leaves even get big.

Read response to #5. It needs to be caged or screened off, usually with supports so as the plant grows, the netting won't sit on the plants.

8. Can the sweet potato be grown in pots?

Will let you know. I'm doing that now. The leafy and stems parts are doing very well. After it turns brown, I'll be turning the whole contents out and see what I get. I am using a 15 gal can.



Southern California Horticultural Society – October 2020 Webinar Questions

9. If you plant Japanese sweet potatoes, can you build the soil like you would with regular potatoes to be able to grow more in a small space? Can they be grown in pots?

See question #8. Sweet potatoes make long viney stems. They need to grow out to some available space, or, they can be trellised. They need all those leaves to produce the bulbous part.

10. Which of these featured plants will grow well in some shade?

Lettuce, chard, bok choy, kale, purple mustard, collard greens, turnip, mizuna.

11. Where is your teaching garden?

It is at Boden St & Carmona Ave (the eastern end of the LADWP land).

12. What size of pots do you use for veggies?

Pots about 15" in diameter, and at least 8-10" deep will let you grow bok choy or lettuce. Don't plant more than 3 seedlings, evenly spaced. The most common mistake people make is over-planting. The seedlings often look so small when you buy them, or you start seed. But you need to plant with the spacing of a semi-grown plant in mind. Also, though you could tuck in 3 green onions, or even 2 garlics, a parsley – if it grows well can take up a diameter of 10 inches.

13. Any tips germinating shiso seeds? I've tried without success.

Gosh, I've never had to do that. I bought a seedling once. Ever since, the plant has flowered and made seeds and plant themselves every spring. As time has gone by, I have more shiso every year.

14. Any advice for keeping bugs from eating my tatsoi?

It helps to know which bugs you have. If they're aphids, wipe them off with your fingers and be persistent. One aphid can produce 100s of daughter aphids in 2 weeks. If it's a new pest, the Bagrada bug, you need to catch it, smush it, or drown it. If you have a huge infestation, you can try a portable vacuum, but you still need to go after the escapees. Bagrada bug is very prolific, lays eggs in the soil, so they'll be back next spring. No, Neem oil won't be effective – they move very fast and can fly a bit – you have to hit them bullseye with a spray of Neem oil. It doesn't work as a residue.

15. Can I grow kabocha or kuri kabocha now? I am in southern California. thanks!!



Southern California Horticultural Society – October 2020 Webinar Questions

Sorry, but kabocha (all the squashes) are summer crops. They are planted in the spring, grow through the summer. They need long, sunny days. They're harvested in the fall, from August to November, depending on when planted, how well they've grown, etc.

16. A Japanese neighbor was recently telling me to plant Ashitaba. It seems to be used medicinally, but also as food. Can you comment?

I'm sorry, but I am not familiar with that plant. I just looked it up on Wikipedia (don't use the internet medical sites – often unreliable), and while it seems to be a popular folk remedy for a variety of ailments, a compound in it could make users susceptible to sunburn.

17. What insects or diseases generally attack legume plants?

The most common probably are aphids. This year they were on my home-grown long beans, but they're not on our plants in the teaching garden. We're pretty vigilant about aphids, and jet-stream them away at the first sighting. If you do that, they stay pretty free of them. We fortunately do not have problems with the bean beetles.

18. Are greens of Winged Beans edible?

Yes, all parts of the Winged Bean are edible.

19. Do you put compost on the solid or work it in? My soil is very dry and compost is lying above. With drip irrigation I'm not sure compost adds any nutrients.

Compost should be incorporated into the first 8" of your planting soil. You'll lose nutrients (esp. Nitrogen) quickly if it's just sitting on top of the soil. If your soil is very dry, you should also be incorporating into some planting mix or potting soil (which contains peat moss, or coir, some forest products (ground up, sl. Composted woody pieces), some natural fertilizers like chicken manure,). After you've mixed that all in – into the 8 – 12" top area of your planting soil, and after you've planted your seedlings, lay on some mulch (straw – not hay -, leafy mulch, or even a layer of small or shredded large leaves. The mulch will help keep the moisture in. When you water, don't hit the soil with a hard/strong spray. "Be the rain" let the water fall and get soaked into the soil. Use a chopstick or your fingers, when you think you're done, and see if it's moist (not soggy) to 2-3" beneath the surface.

Good luck, everyone! Plant now, your fall/winter garden. Plant especially your peas, mustards, bok choy, arugula.