

Gardening Q&A

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Q. I am from Michigan and trying to figure out what is a good firewood here in the South Texas area. I imagine that the varieties of oak are good choices? How about hackberry? Are there any other tree varieties that make good firewood?

A. You are right, the oaks are excellent for firewood. If you haul in red oak make sure that if it was killed by oak wilt that it has dried out for a season. It will be checked and split if it has cured for a season. Hackberry is okay, especially if you can use it along with oak. I think cedar elm is in the same league or slightly better than hackberry. Mesquite is a premiere bar-b- que fuel but I also like it for firewood.

Q. We bought some 1015 onions at the nursery. Please tell us about planting them.

A. Prepare the soil in a garden in full sun with 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) for every 100 sq. ft of bed. Plant them in the row with 2 inches between plants. That will require about 3 8 ft. rows to have room for the 50 onions in the bundle. You wanted 6 inches of space between each onion by mid-March so plan on using 2 of every 3 onions for green onions by then. Also fertilize again along the row with "winterizer" or slow release lawn fertilizer. That will allow the remaining onions to develop full bulbs for harvest after Mid-May.

Q. After the freeze burnt all the foliage of our tomatoes, we pulled the plants up and discovered that they were infected with nematodes. What does that mean in terms of the use of the area for future plantings? Is there anyway we can treat the soil?

A. Discard the infected roots in a garbage bag in the garbage so they won't affect any other soil. That means no recycling of the roots or placing them in the compost pile. There isn't any viable pesticide treatment for nematodes at this time, but if you plant cereal rye now and incorporate it in the soil, it will reduce the population. You can also plant crops such as onions or corn which are not susceptible to nematodes. There are also several tomato varieties including Celebrity, BHN 968, Tycoon, and Valley Girl which are nematode resistant.

Q. Which of the spring bulbs can we plant without a chill period? We obtained some pre-chilled tulips and will plant them on January 1 as recommended. But want to try some others.

A. Paperwhites and daffodils can be planted without the cold treatment. Almost every paperwhite selection can be naturalized in sun or partial shade. The forced bulbs you received for an indoor Christmas decoration will even work. Some daffodil selections will also work including Golden Spector, Campenelle, Trevithian and Quail. Unfortunately, King Alfred does not survive and naturalize in our region.

Q. The broccoli in our garden was burned by the freeze in November. Can we still harvest the heads? They look okay.

A. Yes, the plants will recover and produce side shoots after a short delay. The original heads can be used without hesitation.