

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. A fierce-looking wasp like insect is digging holes in my shrub border. It buzzes the dog but so far has ignored the people. Do you know what it is? Is it a threat? Should we kill it with wasp spray?

A. I think what you are seeing is a cicada killer. They eat grasshopper like insects. It will capture a cicada and lay an egg with it in the hole. When the egg hatches the larvae will eat the cicada as it develops. Cicada killers are beneficial wasps that generally ignore humans. It is not unusual for dogs to aggravate them but usually does not result in a sting. If possible, let the cicada killer conduct its business in your landscape.

Q. We had a terrible time with our lawn last year. We think the problem was TARR (Take All Root Rot). We added soil, treated with sphagnum peat, and even replaced sod. Now with the rain the lawn looks great, but we don't want the problem to re-occur. They have now identified a Scotts Product, Disease EX, as being capable of treating TARR. Do you think it would work as a preventative so we would not have to go through that again?

A. I am suspicious that the problems you describe were not TARR. Is your lawn in the shade? You can only use a fungicide as a preventative if the label allows it. Most fungicides do not allow it. I think it is best if you let the revitalized lawn run its course this spring so you can see if the problem was really TARR and if it is cured. If the fungus returns, try the new the Scotts Disease EX.

Q. How much yield should we expect from our crop of new potatoes? We have only been getting about 4 potatoes per plant with 2 golf ball size and 2 tennis ball size.

A. That is not an unusual yield. This is not Idaho or Maine. With some fertilization and more mounding, you can probably bring it up to 5 or 6 potatoes per plant next year. Our Central Texas yields are small, and the potatoes don't store well, but they taste good!

Q. We have small army worm type insects hanging on threads from our live oak trees. They also accumulate on the side of the house. Should we kill them? What are they eating?

A. There are at least 3 species of such caterpillars in area landscapes. They are eating new foliage on oaks and other plants. They aren't considered a threat to area plants but can be unpleasant if they accumulate or are hanging all over the yard. The usual tactic is to ignore them. A malathion or Spinosad spray will kill those that accumulate on the sides of the building.

Q. We have the chance to purchase some Emerald zoysia grass from an area turf supplier. It looks and sounds wonderful but an area landscaper that we often use says if we have Emerald zoysia, we need to have a reel mower, a rotary mower will not work! Is that true?

A. A reel mower works better on zoysia grass than a rotary mower does but if you keep your rotary mower sharp and mow every week, a rotary mower works fine. I had an Emerald zoysia grass lawn at a previous house and relied on a rotary mower. Emerald zoysia makes a beautiful lawn.