

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. I am rebuilding my raised beds and it surprises me how many snails and slugs are hidden in every nook and cranny between and under the railroad ties. It makes me think that the foliage damage that I blamed on insects was just as likely to have been done by slugs and snails. Are there any general principles to follow in the construction of raised beds that minimize the number of slugs and snails?

A. The closer that the railroad ties fit together the fewer “nooks and crannies” will exist but it is not easy to make a tight structure with heavy irregularly shaped railroad ties. It may just be easier to apply a slug and snail bait whenever you experience any damage from them. As you indicated despite the large number of slugs and snails that live in and around a garden area, the damage is tolerable.

Q. Last year we were overwhelmed with the weed bedstraw. It was in the lawn and the shrub border. What would be the best preemergent to use to prevent it this year? When should it be applied?

A. Although Dimension and Amaze do well at preventing broadleaf weeds, even if they are primarily formulated for grassy weeds, I would use Gallery or one of the other preemergent herbicides formulated for broadleaf weeds. Apply it right now. Follow label instructions.

Q. What are the big red and black wasps that dig the holes in the hard. They look fierce, should we control them? If so, how?

A. I believe you are describing cicada killers. They are a beneficial wasp that lay their eggs in the hole they dig and then put in a cicada for the young wasp to eat as they develop. As fierce as they look, they rarely sting anyone so protect them if possible.

Q. We got an opportunity to receive a potted live oak from a neighbor that changed her mind about planting it. Do we dare plant it now or must we wait until later in the fall?

A. Late fall and early winter are always the best time to plant trees and shrubs but as long as you keep them well watered the success ratio of plantings during the rest of the year is also high. Dig the hole as deep as the container and twice as wide. Soak the root ball in the hole and then water it again through the year as soon as the soil dries to 2 inches deep. If you cover the root ball area with 3 inches of mulch, it also helps.

Q. I want you to know that your idea of testing the cause of brown areas in my lawn by generously watering them by hand did reveal that it was a lack of water. The test areas greened up as you predicted!

A. Yes, there are so many issues related to the need for water that the results you describe are most common. Temperatures of 100 degrees plus, shallow soil, compacted soil, and uneven sprinkler applications are the usual cause of browning areas in a summer lawn in full sun.