

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. My live oak tree foliage is covered with fluffy growth that looks like a fungus. The tree is only a few years old and 10 feet tall. Any idea what the fungus might be and how it should be treated?

A. From the way you describe it, I believe it is probably mealy bugs, a form of aphids that suck the plant juices while protected by that calcium coating that looks like fungus. Mealy bugs are most common on tropical hibiscus. On a small plant you can do a fair job of controlling the mealy bugs by spraying them off with water pressure or hand removing them. Acephate and other systemic insecticides work sometimes when sprayed on the plant.

Q. You were right about the brown patches in my lawn, they greened up with the rain we received.

A. It is not easy growing a lawn in Central and South Texas. We have a shallow soil that is often compacted or poorly drained with the result that it has a limited reservoir for growing roots and storing water. Do not celebrate too soon, the lawn can dry out again before the cool weather settles in!

Q. We have a beautiful coral vine that is growing along our fence and over the corner of our house. In addition to having attractive flowers the bees, butterflies and hummingbirds obtain nectar from the flowers. That being said, we are worried about it growing over the house. Is there a reasonable way to control a coral vine?

A. Luckily coral vine is sensitive to cold and dies back to the roots with the first near-freezing temps. Other control options are to physically prune it back and to apply Round-up or Remedy to the growing vine. You can use one of the hose end sprayer or pre-mixed containers to spray the base or lead growing edge.

Q. When is the best time to begin our winter bird feeding program? We take a break over the summer to reduce the rodent dependence on the seeds but do not want to miss out on the action over the winter.

A. November 1 is a reasonable time. Most winter residents will be here by then. If you want to influence the migrating birds on where they will settle in for the winter, October one may not be too early. In addition to the seed provide water and suet. Suet brings in the insect eaters.

Q. What can we plant in the winter vegetable garden now?

A. Plant broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, collards, kale, Chinese cabbage, and Swiss chard transplants. Use seed for radish, lettuce, beets, turnips, rutabagas, and English peas. Wait until November to plant spinach and until December to plant onion transplants.