

Gardening Q&A

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Q. Our gladiolas were beautiful this spring and now they have finished blooming. Do we need to dig them up, or did I hear you on the Gardening South Texas Radio Show saying that they could be left in the ground over the summer and winter?

A. After they finish blooming the glads need to be allowed to stay in the ground until the foliage browns. The foliage is producing starches to be stored in the bulb for the use of the plant during the next growing season. The typical practice is to dig them up at that point and store the bulbs until you replant them in February. I no longer dig them up but leave them in the cut flower garden under the zinnias and snapdragons. So far, I have had them re-grow in the spring. If you want to test this practice in your own garden, dig up half of the gladiolas bulbs and leave half in place. Compare their performance.

Q. We feed the hummingbirds with sugar water. We tolerate the honey bees and the woodpeckers getting a share of the sugar water but do not like the fire ants making regular trips to the feeders. The feeders hang on our house eaves and I don't want to encourage the fire ants to penetrate the house in their trek to reach the feeders. What do you think about it if we brushed on a mix of acephate at the base of their trails on the house and roof?

A Yes, I think that will work. Keep the acephate (spinosad may also work) 4 to 5 feet away from the feeders but you should be able to block the paths to the feeders. Another option to try is to apply a bait like Amdro on the ground around the house. Follow label instructions.

Q. We had a fair tomato crop this year, not nearly as good as last year, but the plants look spent now. Between the heat, mockingbirds, squirrels and spider mites I think we are done producing for the summer. There is no reason we can't pull the old plants now rather than to wait until mid-July, is there?

A. Your plan sounds reasonable. To reduce the chance that the spider mites will quickly get re-established on the new planting at the end of July, put any spider mite infected plants in a garbage sack and dispose of them in the garbage instead of the compost pile.

Q. Some of the leaves on our pecan trees are falling from the trees. They crunch when you walk on them because they seem to be loaded with galls. We don't rely on our pecan crop for income but like to harvest as many nuts as possible. Do you know what the issue is and what we should do to correct it?

A. I think your trees are infected with phylloxera, an aphid-like insect that causes the galls. I also would guess that the leaf drop is increased because of the dry hot weather we have had. If pecans had their way they would have 2 inches of irrigation every week! An amount that is out of reach to most of us. You can reduce the phylloxera populations by spraying dormant oil on the trunks and branches after the leaves fall in the winter. Follow label instructions.