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**“Q&A”**

Q: When should we plant tomatoes in the garden? What are some of the recommended varieties for this area? We tried the same heirloom varieties we used in the Northeast where we came from, but they did not do well here!

A: We have two short tomato seasons in this area. In the spring, from April until the end of June, and from August until Thanksgiving. The determinate or semi-determinate varieties that produce small plants and set fruit quickly work best. Some of the recommended selections include Celebrity, Phoenix, Solar Fire, Valley Cat, BHN 968, BHN 602, Tycoon and Tygress. If your favorite nursery does not have any of them, ask for his/her determinate selections.

Q: Why do they call live oaks evergreen when they drop their leaves every year?

A: I suspect that they are still called evergreens because the trees are only bare of leaves for two weeks before the new leaves fill the empty stems and branches.

Q: My daughter carried some lady bugs home from a school program and we released them with the idea that they would rid our plants of all the aphids and other small insects. My neighbor, who is a great gardener, laughed and said that lady bug releases rarely were effective in controlling insects. Is he correct?

A: Yes, unfortunately. Lady bugs and especially their larvae are effective aphid predators, but the most effective control comes from populations that have grown up in the area of their predation.

Populations purchased from retailers are inclined to move on from the place of their release. Sorry!

Q: I would like to plant some color around a new home; however, I know that some colorful plants are not appropriate near children. I’m new to Texas, so I don’t have much experience with plants that require little water. If you are also aware of other references, I’d appreciate learning of those as well.

A: Go to [plantanswers.com](http://plantanswers.com/) for a poisonous plant list. Most toxic plants taste so bad that pets and children never consume enough to cause illness, but you can use the list to be especially cautious.

Q: We have fire ants in our compost. Is it okay to put in fire ant killer bait?

A: Yes, use bait around the pile or an organic control in the pile, which has label instructions that meet your plans for use of the compost. Regular control chemicals like acephate may also be appropriate. In most situations, the chemicals will be long gone when you finally use the compost!

For questions about horticulture, water conservation and the environment, email Calvin Finch at [Calvin.finch@tamu.edu](mailto:Calvin.finch@tamu.edu)