

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Last year I tried to wait until the bluebonnet seed matured before I harvested it. I waited too long, and the seeds exploded out of the seedpods in the field. What are your recommendations to harvest viable seed?

A. The pods have viable seed when they are full size and have started to turn brown. The pods can be harvested then. Store them in a paper sack or small box. Another option is to pull the full plant as soon as a few of the pods start changing color. Put each of the plants in a paper bag where they can continue maturing. When the seeds are launched, they will be caught by the sack.

Q. A contractor planted Palmetto St Augustine for my new lawn last fall. It appears to be dead. Should I replace the sod? Is there any guidance to be more successful?

A. It is too early to expect all lawns to be greened up, especially sod just laid last fall. Take another look at the sod. Have the roots entered the soil? Are there any green blades starting to emerge? I would expect that if the sod came from a recognized source and was placed and rolled on a prepared soil that it will green up.

Q. We are into butterflies and so have not been spraying our peach trees this spring. They are loaded with nice looking fruit, what can we expect if we go the whole season without spraying for insects? Would using an organic insecticide make a difference?

A. It is true that a general fruit tree spraying every week will kill butterflies. The trade-off is that your peaches will probably be scarred by stink bugs and other insects. Most you will still be able to eat but they will not be blemish free. If you had one or two isolated trees you could probably spray them without major impact on the butterflies but with a number of trees or in a landscape where there are blooming plants near or under the trees, the spraying will take its toll. Both organic and manufactured insecticides are a threat to butterflies.

Q. We just planted our tomatoes and several of the plants died after I fertilized with slow-release lawn fertilizer. Could there be a problem with the fertilizer? Does it make a difference if the fertilizer is applied against the stem of the transplant?

A. Yes, fertilizer can kill transplants where the material is placed to touch the stem and injures the vascular system. Spread the material over the area where the root system is expected to grow and a small distance (2 inches) from the stem. I have not heard any reports of any special problems with the fertilizer.

Q. What is a good flowering plant to replace our cyclamen? The temperature hit 90 degrees a couple of days and they (the cyclamen) seemed to melt.

A. I like pentas or begonias for color in the shade in the summer. Try the showy "Whopper Begonias".