

Gardening Q&A

10-06-2019

Q. Our lawn is nearly all brown. We suspect the problem is caused by grubs. Can we go ahead and treat for grubs at the same time as we apply fertilizer for the fall?

A. What makes you suspect damage from grubs? A completely brown lawn after record high temperatures and no rain leads me to suspect the lack of water is the cause of the browning. Grubs usually cause a moth-eaten pattern of damage, not solid brown. In addition, it is not effective to treat grubs this late in the season, June 1 is more effective because the grubs are still feeding. Dig around at the edge of the brown grass. If you find grubs, make a note on your calendar for next June one to treat them with a soil insecticide.

It is also not effective to fertilize a lawn that is dormant or brown. The grass plants can only pick up the nutrients if they have green functioning leaves. My recommendation is to postpone fertilization until May 1 next spring.

Q. Is there any way to feed the birds without having the squirrels eat everything?

A. There are several ways to discourage squirrels at your bird feeders

1. Use a steel feeder with weight sensitive perches.
2. Use safflower seeds instead of other seeds. Squirrels do not like safflower seeds but most seed eating birds do.
3. Feed suet and seeds that have been flavored by pepper. It does not bother the birds, but the squirrels do not like the taste.

Q. We have mealy bugs on our hibiscus. Is there any way to effectively treat them?

A. I like to spray acephate on the plant and the visible insects. It kills by contact and is also a systemic. My colleague Dr Parsons finds it more effective to detect the mealy bugs before they become to prevalent and cut off the pieces of stem where they are lodged. For this to work you must catch them early.

Q. The acorns from our live oak and red oak trees are driving us crazy. They lodge themselves in the dog's paws and are generally just a mess on the yard. Surely there must be an easy way to reduce their production or pick them up?

A. I don't know of any way to control acorn production. They are an essential wildlife food and are collected rather quickly by birds, deer, and squirrels. Have you tried an outdoor vacuum cleaner? If it works to collect the acorns place them in a pile outside you fence so the wildlife can use them.

Q. When can we plant pansies. I am surprised that our local nursery does not have transplants yet.

A. They do best when the soil and air temperatures have cooled. Plant them after mid-October when there is less likelihood for us to experience more hot temps.