

## Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Our rural neighborhood has lots of large trees, especially live oaks. Some of the trees are 4 feet in diameter. I always heard that the large old live oaks are unlikely to break or topple over even if they are largely hollow. Several weeks ago, a very large oak broke about 4 feet from the ground. Luckily it missed the two houses growing on either side, but it wiped out a long fence. Are we in a Catch 22 situation with our old, large live oaks?

A. I am one of those who believes the large old live oaks are relatively safe from falling over, even when they are partially hollow. That doesn't mean, however that they will never break or fall over. We see lots of film from hurricanes where large trees have been uprooted. Large live oaks are treasures and add significant value to properties, so I believe it is worth it to pay for a visit every 2 or 3 years from a certified arborist to assess the trees status. The real dilemma comes when your arborist says the tree should be removed. Get a second opinions and then make a tough decision.

Q. We were unable to water our Bermuda grass lawn enough to keep it alive. We want a green lawn and will do better with the watering from now on. Should we replace the lawn now or next spring?

A. Bermuda grass lawns go dormant if they are short of water. Once the rains resume it will only take a few days for it to green up. Zoysia takes longer to green-up but it also can tolerate drying out. Even St Augustine grass can be dry for 3 weeks and fully recover.

Q. We love spinach and want to grow some for ourselves. There are 2 adults and 2 youth in the family. How many plants will it take to supply spinach for salads and cooking? When can we plant the seed?

A. Prepare the soil with 10 cups of slow release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9 works well) and 2 inches of compost incorporated into every 100 sq. ft. of garden bed. If possible, irrigate with drip irrigation. Use transplants placed ever foot in the row rather than seed. For a family of 4 grow at least 3 rows of spinach. Wait and plant the transplants in November. Spinach seed and transplants do not respond well to hot soil or the warm spells we often get in October.

Q. Last year we tried to grow broccoli and cauliflower, but the plants were devoured by cabbage loopers. Is there a trick to using Bt products? The plants were eaten even though we sprayed the worms.

A. Bt products are sprayed on the foliage of the cole crops as soon as you see any caterpillars or damage. The worms must consume the Bt as they feed on the foliage. The other issue is that the Bt should not be more than 1 year old in the container. Did you dilute the material in water as directed? Bt is generally very effective but must be sprayed on the foliage before there is much damage.

Q. Do any of the winter annuals have any fragrance? We are tired of the modern snapdragons and want to try something with more personality!

A. Stocks, alyssum and sweet peas are all winter annuals that can be planted now and have wonderful fragrances. They all grow best in full sun. Use stock and sweet peas for cut flowers. Plant alyssum and stock as transplants. Use seed for sweet peas.