Pests in the Landscape

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All the rain has forced the fire ants to move from deep to shallow, visible mounds. To control them, consider a traditional two-prong strategy. Apply a quick-kill insecticide, such as acephate to the visible mounds near your activities. For a majority of the yard, spread a bait, such as Amdro, over the area. It is slower to act on existing hills, but is effective after two weeks. Gardeners preferring an organic control can seek a product with Spinosad as the active ingredient. It can even be used in the vegetable garden. For all pesticides, manufactured or organic,  follow the label instructions.

Snails and slugs have also prospered in the moist weather. They are hiding under the lush foliage and in every crack and crevice in the landscape, to emerge at night to eat foliage and fruit. You can control them with a slug-and-snail bait. Baits can be in the form of large granules or small flakes. The granules last longer in the rainy weather, but may tempt birds. There are both organic and manufactured chemical forms of slug-and-snail bait.

Early peaches are ripening now. If you protected them with an insecticide and fungicide spray every week, they probably escaped insect or disease damage. Unfortunately, birds and squirrels (and other mammals) are not discouraged by the spray programs. If they damaged the early fruit with their beaks, you can expect even more pressure on the later ripening fruit. Consider covering the trees with bird netting.

Bird netting will not protect the ripening fruit from squirrels, rats, raccoons or other mammals. If you notice fruit disappearing or partially chewed fruit from their activities, you probably have to trap them with a live trap. If your community’s ordinances don’t prevent it, they can be destroyed or relocated several miles away.

There are at least three types of caterpillars that feed on young live oak leaves. You’ll find the most noticeable species when they hang from the tree on long web strings. A Bt product is the usual way to control caterpillars, but it is not usually necessary for live oak. Unless they are very young or stressed, live oaks live through a caterpillar attack without any long-term effects.