Question and Answer

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Q. There are a number of very large fierce-looking bugs with wide legs on my snapdragons. They fly up every time we come near to cut some flowers. What are they? Is there something we can spray them with?

A. They sound like leaf-footed bugs, which are one of the stink-bug relations. They feed by injecting digestive juice into the plant stems or fruit and sucking the resultant stew back out. Since snapdragons only have about one more month of bloom left, you probably do not need to spray them. They are hard to kill. Sevin or malathion work the best.

Q. We had a wonderful sweet pea (the fragrant flower) crop this spring and now they seem to be going to seed. Should we remove the seed in hopes of more bloom? Can we collect the seed for planting next year?

A. Yes, you can do both. Try removing the spent flowers and small pods over the next two weeks and then let the plants set seed on that last flush of bloom. Collect the seed when the pods are full-size and they have begun to turn brown.

Q. We have been feeding the birds sunflower seed, suet and mixed grain all winter but now we seem to be feeding only white-winged doves, starlings, and English sparrows. We are also worried about rodents. Is it a problem if we stop feeding now for the summer?

A. You have a number of options. You can take a break until next winter, the birds will do fine. Eliminate the suet for the summer and the starlings will move on. You could also reduce your feeding to thistle in tube feeders especially made for the seed. They accommodate goldfinches and discourage doves and some of the sparrows. You can also replace sunflower seed with safflower seed. Use tube feeders or steel feeders with weight sensitive perches. Cardinals, chickadees, and house finches like the safflower seed but it is not a favorite of doves or English sparrows. If you decide to continue to provide sunflower seed and mixed grain, only put out enough that it is all consumed by noon. Such a strategy reduces rodent dependence on the feeders as a food source. Use sugar water feeders for the hummingbirds.

Q. Thought you would like to know that we planted Red Deuce and BHN 968 rodeo tomatoes in containers on March 15 and both are blooming and setting fruit already. We are fertilizing with Osmocote and Miracid soluble fertilizer. Last year we didn’t do well with our tomatoes but this year it looks very promising. Thanks for your help.

A. Sounds good, you’re welcome.

Q. Which shade tree grows faster between Texas red oak, live oak, Mexican white oak, and cedar elm? Can we still plant a shade tree, or should we wait until the fall?

A. All the trees you mention are high quality long-lived shade trees for our area. Container grown trees can be planted year-around as long as they can be watered as the soil dries out to the touch. Use mulch over the root system. Texas red oak and Mexican white oak grow faster than live oak and cedar elm.