

## Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Why don't landscapers use more zoysia grass? It has good traffic tolerance, can go dormant and return when water is available, prospers in alkaline soil, and is very attractive.

A. You did not mention that it is some shade tolerance. In addition to all the good characteristics zoysia grass has some less desirable features. To keep it green, zoysia requires as much water as St Augustine grass. It is also a difficult grass to mow. Your rotary mower must be sharp, or even better, you should use a reel mower. Zoysia grass grows slower than St Augustine or Bermuda grass and is slow to repair itself. Zoysia is also fast to go dormant in the fall and slow to green-up in the spring. That being said, zoysia is my favorite grass for the reasons you describe.

Q. How can you recommend Sevin to control stink bugs and Bt to control cabbage loopers but see yourself as a butterfly advocate? Both of those products kill caterpillars.

A. If you are careful you can use pesticides for insect control and still encourage butterfly production in your landscape. Tolerate as much insect feeding as you can and then use an effective insecticide to control an offending infestation over a limited area. Avoid general widespread sprays in favor of Sevin on the tomato plants where the stink bugs are feeding or Bt on the broccoli plants. Meanwhile your milkweed, passion vine, flame acanthus, zinnias, and lantana are pesticide free and loaded with butterflies and caterpillars.

Q Our red potatoes are looking good. I expect to begin harvesting them soon. The white potatoes tops all died though, and there are no potatoes? Any ideas?

A. I conferred with Dr. Jerry Parsons, a retired Vegetable Specialist with the AgriLife Extension. He thinks it is probably early blight (alternaria), a fungal foliage disease. He relates that it is one of the diseases that fueled the potato famine in Ireland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. White potatoes seem to be more susceptible to it. He did not identify any effective treatment. This has been a spring for fungal diseases. I have quit trying to grow white potatoes because the red potatoes are easier to grow.

Q. Is it too late to fertilize the lawn?

A. No, it is still a good time to fertilize. Use a slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 at a rate to apply 1lb of nitrogen per 100 sq. ft. of grass. The lowest application rate usually results in the 1 lb. per 1000 sq. ft. application. The 19-5-9 is also an excellent fertilizer to use for flowers and vegetables in the garden.

Q. Our live oaks have caterpillars eating the leaves. They hang from web like strings. What should we do to control them?

A. On a small newly planted tree you could use a Bt product such as Thuricide, Dipel, or Bio-Worm Control to control the caterpillar but on an established tree it really isn't necessary to control the worms. They do a small amount of damage which is quickly repaired without any long term impact.

Q. When should we pull our snapdragons in favor of planting zinnias? The snapdragons look beautiful but I am anxious to plant the zinnias for cut flowers and the butterflies.

A. The snaps usually begin to decline from the heat and fungal rust after mid-May. In the meantime plant zinnias in any gaps in the garden bed. You can also load up on mistflower, porter weed, milkweed and other excellent nectar plants in containers or in other garden beds.