

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Our tomatoes are full of fruit that has started to ripen but something is wrong with the foliage. The leaves and stems are dying from the bottom up. Is there anything we can do to stop the spread and protect the fruit?

A. The symptoms sound like early blight, a fungus disease. The fungicide Daconil (active ingredient chlorothalonil) will stop the spread of the damage long enough for the fruit to ripen and be harvested. Follow label instructions.

Q. Four o'clocks are taking over our rose bed. I pull the tops off but they just return. Is there any solution?

A. Four o'clocks are tough to control, they have a deep root system. I have the same problem in a bed of tough modern roses (Belinda's Dream and Katy Road roses). After you break off the top growth dab on some "Cut Vine and Stump Killer". The product translocates through the exposed vascular system into the roots. There is a brush applicator on the cap. The product is reasonably priced and effective. Make sure, however, that none is applied to the roses or drips on the stems or exposed roots.

Q. What small sun loving plant can I grow in hanging baskets on the patio? The purslane foliage grows well but they never seem to bloom!

A. Try moss roses. They are just as sun loving and drought tolerant as purslane but produce more blooms over a longer part of the day.

Q. We planted new red oak trees four years ago. Two of them are growing very fast and two are just hanging on. The only difference that I can see is that the 2 slow-growing trees have string mower damage at the base. Is it possible that the damage could affect the trees growth rate?

A. String mower damage is a prevalent problem for young trees. The wounds interfere with the trees ability to move water and nutrients to the leaves from the roots. Once the damage occurs the tree usually never fully recovers. To prevent the problem keep the string mower (and other equipment) away from the trunk of the tree. One thing that helps is to apply a ring of mulch 4 inches deep 3 feet around the trunk so grass and weeds don't grow close to the trunk and tempt you or your lawn person to string mow close to the trunk. I generally recommend that trees with the damage that are showing reduced growth due to girdling be replaced.

Q. Why would anyone use manufactured fertilizer when organic fertilizer is available?

A. Organic fertilizers work well over the long term if you apply enough consistently. Manufactured fertilizers are often selected because the cost of the nutrients, especially nitrogen is less expensive. It takes nearly 5 times as much organic fertilizer with 4% nitrogen as the common slow release fertilizer, 19-5-9. Organic nitrogen sources are also slow to make the nitrogen available. For a production machine like a determinate hybrid tomato to produce to full potential it requires lots of nitrogen to be available quickly and also over the long term.