

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Did it ever get resolved whether we should mow the lawn lower or higher in the winter than in the summer?

A. It is resolved in my mind. Mow the lawn at the same height in the summer and the winter. My recommendation is 3.5 inches for St Augustine, 1.5 inches or less for Bermuda grass, 2 inches for zoysia grass and 4.5 inches or taller for buffalo grass. If you are lucky enough to have a dense sod mowing it at the same height preserves it as long as it is growing. Once it goes dormant mowing any weeds that emerge at the same height is effective in maintaining an attractive lawn.

Q. Is it better to plant a wildflower mix or to buy packets of your favorite wildflower species and plant them? This year bluebonnet seeds seem hard to find?

A. The best tactic seems to be to plant a Texas Mix to begin with. See which varieties prosper on the planting site. If one or more species does especially well and you want more of it or to expand its range, you can buy the individual seeds. Bluebonnet seed harvest by producers has been low for several years because of the weather.

Q. We have cabbage loopers in our garden that are controlled well by Bt but there is another gray worm that feeds on the stems and leaves that does not seem to be affected by the Bt product. Do you have any idea what it is and how to control it?

A. It sounds like cutworms. They hide out in the soil at the base of the plant and then emerge to feed. As the name implies they usually are most damaging because they cut off transplants and seedlings at the soil level. When they feed on foliage a Bt product such as Dipel, Thuricide or Bio Worm Killer usually controls them. To control them at soil level apply a malathion spray at the soil level along the plant row. Follow label instructions for both the Bt and the malathion.

Q. Our fall tomatoes are doing well but it is time to fertilize them again. I know you recommend using "winterizer" fertilizer for the task this time of the year but we have an opened bag of slow-release lawn fertilizer, can we use it up first?

A. Yes, go ahead and use it. The only issue is that the slow release nitrogen (50%) will not all be available to the tomatoes before it is time to harvest.

Q. When is the recommended time to plant cyclamen? They are beautiful and hard to resist in the nursery but I understand if they are planted too early and subjected to autumn hot spells, they don't last long.

A. Yes, your understanding is correct. Some years they prosper when planted in October but it is usually best to wait until November.