

Question and Answer

Distribute 11-20-2017

Q. Is pittosporum deer proof? I understood that the deer ate it, but they ignored it in our friend's neighborhood where we attended a party.

A. In my neighborhood the deer do not eat standard pittosporum, but some gardeners report that they eat the shrub in their neighborhood. You may have to run a test to be sure.

Q. Our sago palm fronds are covered with a white powdery material that looks like a fungus to me. It is on both sides of the fronds. It is difficult, but you can rub the white material off. What is it? Is it a problem? How should I treat it?

A. It sounds like scale insect to me. Scale are sucking insects that live in a calcium shell that resembles a powder just as you describe. Control scale with dormant oil, or a mixture of dormant oil and acephate. Spray the material as per the dormant oil label instructions and the scale will slowly die.

Q. If we decide to use leaves in the compost pile and or as mulch, do we have to segregate the leaves by variety? We have live oak, red oak, bur oak, and pecan. Is there a danger from the oaks from oak wilt? Are there any other diseases spread by the leaves to be worried about?

A. The leaves can be used together or by species. Some gardeners like the live oak leaves best for paths or between rows in the garden because they are small and firm. Live oak leaves will mostly drop in early March, long after the other leaves drop.

Q. Our tomatoes have been disappointing this fall. If I go ahead and pull them now we won't miss any kind of resurrection, will we? They won't suddenly perk up this fall, will they?

A. It has been a disappointing autumn for tomatoes. The weather was very hot and dry at times and then there were spells of cool weather. By pulling your plants early you may miss some yield of cherry tomatoes if your plants are still blooming and setting fruit, but if you harvest all the full size green fruit and let them ripen in the house, you won't miss much.

Q. What are the best flowers to use this winter to replace the zinnias, porter weed, lantanas, mistflower, and milkweed that provided the butterflies nectar this summer?

A. Use calendulas, dianthus, alyssum, and pansies in the sun, and primula in the shade. The weeds horseherb and frog-eyes will also provide nectar for winter flying butterflies. If it does not freeze early in the winter lantanas, cape honeysuckle, duranta, and plumbago will keep blooming.

