

Gardening Q&A

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Q. I have sprayed my broccoli, spinach and cabbage with Safer Bt, but it doesn't seem to be controlling the loopers. The damage continues to expand. What are some other options?

A. Bt is usually the best control for caterpillars. Do you see cabbage loopers under the leaves that are damaged? Have you added 2 teaspoons of dish detergent to each gallon of spray? Is the Bt less than 1 year old since it has been opened? Is there a chance that slugs, snails or some kind of beetle are contributing to the damage? Spinach is especially likely to be eaten by some other pests. Sometimes if you visit the garden after 10 PM with a flashlight you can see what is causing the damage. Consider spraying malathion if there is a beetle involved. Also apply slug and snail bait to the area.

Q. We have purchased a new home and want a lawn that won't be ruined by our two Labradors running along the fence. Which grass will be best? It is full sun at this point. Can we plant sod now?

A. Bermuda grass has the best traffic tolerance but even it will show a dog path along the fence. It is especially true if the yard is small or medium sized. Zoysia is the second most traffic tolerant. Once you lay the sod you will have to keep the dogs off it for a while if you want any chance of minimizing the trail along the fence. A 6-month period for the grass to become established is advisable but usually not practical. It turns out that the path along the fence is not that bad after all.

Q. Tell us again which leaves can we use in the compost pile and use for mulch? We have pecans, bur oak, Texas red oak and later live oak.

A. All the leaves are useful as mulch and in the compost pile. You can also choose to let them decompose on the lawn. If they are mowed they decompose faster. In our alkaline, organic material poor soils, all leaves are valuable. They should never be wasted by being raked and bagged for the landfill.

Q. The nursery where I buy my live Christmas tree disagrees with you that the best choice is from among Aleppo pine, Italian stone pine, Deodora cedar, and Arizona cypress. He likes the Afghan pine. I must admit it looks the most attractive to me too.

A. Unfortunately the Afghan pine does not survive when planted in our landscapes. It is short lived because of susceptibility to insects and fungus. Ten years appears to be the maximum survival length.

Q. Is it too late to plant larkspur seed for blooms next spring?

A. No, the seed can be planted in rows or as a wild flower by spreading it on the soil surface in sunny areas where the seed can reach the soil. It won't work in sod or areas where there is a thick weed cover.

Q. Will tomatoes survive 35-degree weather, or should we just pick all the fruit and call it a season?

A. I would pick all the mature fruit, but the plant and immature fruit should survive 35 degrees without protection. It is not unusual, however, for a 35 degree prediction to result in 32 degree weather in some low areas or at higher elevations. The conservative path is to cover the plants and then you can take advantage of the mild temperatures that usually follow the first December cold spell.