

Gardening Q&A

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Q. My Knockout rose quit blooming 2 months ago and it looks as if it has been sprayed with a herbicide but we can't figure out how it would have been sprayed. In addition to witch's brooms, the stems are red and very thorny. Do you have any other ideas?

A. In addition to herbicide spray, the symptoms you describe fit the virus disease, "Rose Rosette Disease," RRD. The disease has appeared in Dallas and now San Antonio. It is spread by a very small mite. There is no cure at this point so infected plants must be removed so the mites can't spread the virus to uninfected plants. For more information and photos of plants with the symptoms visit plantanswers.com.

Q. Our spinach looks very ragged. It has holes chewed in every leaf. We have used Bt, but the holes continue. We have seen a green flying beetle on the plants. Could it be eating the foliage. Is there a better insecticide than Bt to control it?

A. The beetle you describe is a cucumber beetle and it is probably the culprit doing the damage. Bt only controls caterpillars. To kill cucumber beetles, you will have to use Sevin, permethrin, or malathion. I have good results with malathion. The beetles also feed on chard. Follow label instructions.

Q. Why was there so little damage from all the snow? Some of my zinnias, impatiens, green beans and tomatoes show burnt foliage but nothing else was killed. The snow was 2 inches deep over my flower and vegetable gardens!

A. The weight of the snow can sometimes cause breakage, but the snow does not cause the freeze damage. The air temperature must be lower than the plants tolerance point. The snow is rarely colder than the air and may be warmer. The plants that were damaged are sensitive to the 32-degree and 33-degree temperatures that we experienced.

Q. My tomato foliage was slightly burnt by the cold, but the fruit looks unharmed. Should I pick it all or can I leave it in place for awhile hoping that it will ripen more?

A. The fruit may gain some maturity by setting on the plant until the next cold spell but to avoid suffering from another unexpected damaging cold spell, I advise that you harvest the full-size fruit and let it ripen in the house.

Q. What do you recommend as the best Christmas gift for a gardener. It is not easy to pick the right plant or tool!

A. I think a gift certificate at the gardener's favorite nursery is the best and easiest present for a gardener. You control the cost and the gardener gets to select something they want and are ready to use or plant.