

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. What are the green and white beetles eating my spinach plants? What can I spray them with?

A. The beetles are probably cucumber beetles. They can be controlled with malathion. You could also try one of the vegetable sprays with an organic active ingredient such as pyrethrin or spinosad.

Q. I potted up my tomatoes and now they are 18 inches tall and have some buds to start blooming. Can I plant them in the garden yet, or is the soil still too cold?

A. Yes, it is best if you go ahead and plant them in the garden. March 15 is often the date we cite as the time when the soil warms up enough to plant tomatoes.

Q. You raved about the Whopper Begonias last year, so we are going to try them. How much sun can they tolerate?

A. If they are planted early in the season (now) they are like semperfloren begonias and can survive a relatively sunny planting site. Plant them in shade or a site that receives morning sun.

Q. Can we use the live oak leaves in our compost pile?

A. Yes, they are valuable as a mulch in the landscape or as an ingredient in the compost pile. One of the easiest ways to take advantage of the nutrients and organic material that the leaves provide is to let them decompose on the lawn. Run the mower over them to speed up the decomposition.

Q. Our lawn looks great right now, lush and green. Apparently, however it is not the St Augustine grass but a grassy weed. This was brought to my attention by my neighbor when he suggested it was too early to fertilize the lawn. I went ahead and fertilized and now I wish I hadn't. How much of an issue is it? What should I do to minimize the problems caused by fertilizing too early. When should we have fertilized?

A. We recommend that you fertilize after you have mowed real grass twice, usually after April 15. It sounds like the lush, green grass you are seeing now is either rescue grass or annual bluegrass. Both weed grasses are trying to set seed now and will decline quickly as the weather warms up. The problem with fertilizing too early is that the weeds use the nutrients, and/or the nitrogen is partially lost to volatilization and leaching rather than by utilization by your permanent grass. It is not a major problem, especially if you used a slow-release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9. You do not have to reapply the fertilizer.