

Gardening Q&A

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Q. We planted vinca in a flower bed because it is attractive, drought tolerant and deer proof. We don't think we over watered when we applied sprinkler irrigation twice/ week. The plants all melted down to mush, however. Is it too much water, or a disease?

A. Two times per week is not too much to water vinca when the temperatures reach 100 degrees F. The problem is probably that you did not use 'Cora' vinca (periwinkle) and you used a sprinkler. The old varieties of vinca are notorious for being susceptible to a fungal disease, aerial phytophthora, that causes the meltdown that you described. They are especially vulnerable if they are irrigated with a sprinkler that dampens the foliage. Replant using 'Cora' vinca and irrigate with drip irrigation or hand water.

Q Our lawn care company said that we should fertilize our St Augustine lawn now. I said that it did not seem appropriate with the weather being so hot and dry. We are also in the midst of Drought Restrictions. Am I right?

A. Yes, you are correct. We sometimes fertilize Bermuda grass in a high traffic situation in the summer if there is adequate water for irrigation. The recommended fertilization times for St Augustine grass are May 1 and October 1.

Q. The loquats and naturalized ligustrum in our landscape are dropping leaves. We grow them mostly for the fruit they provide the birds and never irrigate them. Should we break down and water them?

A. They would benefit from a generous watering once a month over a dry summer and produce more fruit for the birds, but even if they defoliate, they should recover when the rains return.

Q. We planted Tycoon, Sunbrite, and BHN 968 tomatoes for the fall. We water them every day to keep them from wilting. They are growing but they are growing straight up and looked stretched out. Should we be doing something different?

A. Stretching out is a typical reaction to the hot weather we have been experiencing. Once per day irrigation is appropriate. Some gardeners are providing some temporary shade in the afternoon with folded cardboard or fabric on the tomato cage. As soon as the weather breaks, they will fill out.

Q. I let the fruit on our okra plant get too large. Should I remove it and toss it into the compost pile or leave it on the plant?

A. Keep harvesting the pods so that new pods are produced. The over ripe pods should be discarded.