

Gardening Q&A

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Q. Our bougainvillea are blooming less than they were and two plants have wilted leaves that are dropping from the plant. Surely it has not been cool enough to reduce bloom already this fall?

A. It has not been cool enough but it has been wet enough. It is a good bet that the plants that are wilting are not as well drained as the other plants. Their potting mix is older than the bougainvillea that is doing well and if it had an organic base, the material has decomposed. Also remove any water catching saucers under the containers. One option would be for you to transplant the wilting plants into a new larger container. Remove as much of the old potting mix as possible without baring the root ball. Replace the removed potting mix with anew high-quality mix. Only water when the soil dries to one inch. Bouganvilleas will quit blooming when temperatures reach 40 degrees. They should then go in a freeze proof shelter.

Q. How do we know when our lemons and limes are ripe?

A. They can be used anytime now. On my trees I begin using them as soon as they show any yellow color. Both Mexican limes and Meyer lemons eventually turn yellow. You are not worried about them reaching the sweetest state like oranges, grapefruit, and satsumas. The “tang” is desirable. Don’t pick them all but use them as you need them from now until the first serious freeze, usually in December.

Q. We have yellow jackets nesting in the ground along our fence. I try to let them be because of the beneficial nature of their feeding on other insects but they stung my son 6 times while he was mowing the lawn last week. What is your recommendation on controlling them?

A. Yellow jackets are aggressive and prone to defend their nesting area. Unlike bees, the members of the wasp family can sting their victims more than once. I appreciate your interest in protecting yellow jackets for the good they do as insect predators but think it is best to eliminate nests anywhere close to your activities and the activities of your pets and other animals. Usually you will be able to penetrate the nest in the ground with a wasp spray. You can also mix a pail of Sevin or malathion and pour it into the nest. Usually the wasps that nest in structures attached to the house eaves and in trees are less aggressive and can be left alone to eat webworms and other insect pests.

Q. The weather forecast is for cold temperatures over the next few weeks, does that mean we can go ahead and plant spinach transplants? I know you recommend waiting until November, and we usually do but the transplants look good in the nursery and it is almost November.

A. Yes, I think the forecast for cool weather will help reduce the danger of the hot spells that slow down spinach growth and make the plants susceptible to insect damage and heat damage.

Q. We have some slow release lawn fertilizer left from this summer, can we use it for the fall fertilization instead of buying "winterizer" fertilizer?

A. You can but the other option is to obtain the winterizer because the nitrogen is fast release and more useful to the grass plants in the fall. Use the slow release fertilizer for your flowers and winter vegetables. Winter greens and cole crops are especially dependent on fertilization for full production.