Gardening Q & A

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Q. Snapdragons are my favorite winter annual. I planted the Rockets and Sonnet Selections. About one/third of the plants are wilting as if they have a root rot. Is it from the excessive rain we have experienced? The stocks and calendula are doing fine. Should I apply a soil fungicide?

A. I think you are correct in your diagnoses of the problem. In my experience snapdragons are more sensitive to drainage than other winter annuals. Application of a soil fungicide will not hurt the snapdragons but it may not help much at this point either. There is a break in the forecast for rain over the next few weeks and the two/thirds of the snaps that survived will become less vulnerable as their root systems enlarge. For the long term plan on improving drainage in the garden by incorporating 4 inches of compost into the raised bed soil.

Q. We are blessed with rescue grass every winter. I like that idea that you and Jerry Parsons are promoting on your weekend radio show, “to declare the former weed as your new winter lawn grass.” Rescue grass does look great when it is mowed every week. What is the best height to mow it?

A. Mow rescue grass at 2 inches tall. It will look uniform and attractive until March when it becomes dedicated to producing seed heads.

Q. Should we fertilize our iris bed? If so, when and how much?

A. Fertilize the Dutch iris that bloom in late spring in February with slow release or winterizer lawn fertilizer. For the early blooming cemetery iris, they can be fertilized now or in December. Spread one lb. (2 cups) over every 100 sq. ft. of iris bed.

Q. Our favorite retail nursery already has onion transplants. It seems early, but should we go ahead and plant? They have about six different varieties but we only have room for 2. Which varieties do you recommend?

A. It is about 1 month earlier than I normally plant onion transplants. If you plant them early there is more of a chance that they will experience warm and cold spells that will result in some of the onions bolting (go to seed). One advantage to planting early is that you will have access to green onions more quickly. Plant the onions every 2 inches in the row and harvest the 2 middle plants as green onions to allow full development of large bulbs in the remaining onions.

My recommendation is that you grow 1015-y as your primary yellow onion and then one other red or white variety. Red Cajun has a stronger flavor than 1015-Y and stores longer. Bermuda is a good white sweet onion.

Q. You were not kidding about the birds joining the squirrels to feast on the heavy mast crop this year. Grackles and white-winged doves move in waves across the lawn under the trees picking up acorns and pecans. Blue jays and golden-fronted woodpeckers move in as individuals to pick up their share.

A. Do you have deer? They will also eat acorns and pecans. In addition to the bird species you list, smaller birds like Inca doves and English sparrows will pick the meats from the nuts crushed in the driveway and streets. Thanks for the report.