Question and Answer

Distribute June 1

Q. We are harvesting lots of cherry tomatoes (BHN968). They are great but there are a number of fierce-looking flying insects with enlarged legs moving over the plant. What are they? Are they hurting the tomatoes?

A. You are describing leaf-footed bugs. They are related to stink bugs. They feed on the tomatoes by injecting their digestive juices and extracting the resultant soup! Did I ruin your appetite? If they haven’t arrived until the fruit is near-ripe, the only damage would be some yellow streaking. As far as I can tell, the taste of the fruit is not changed. You can control leaf-footed bugs and other stink bugs with a carbaryl (Sevin) spray.

Q. What is the weedy vine with shiny green leaves? It is very hard to pull up by hand and has a large root system. I have tried digging it up. How can I control it?

A. The weed you describe is probably green briar. On fence lines where there are no desirable plants close, you can kill it with Remedy or Roundup. In my shrub border and rose bed, I use the string mower to cut its stems that are not close to the shrubs or roses. Continued hand-pulling is the only way to control it in flower or vegetable gardens. My wife uses a small hand sickle to cut the stems.

Q. What is the small tree (15 feet tall) that is blooming now with white flowers? The leaves are a narrow heart shape with a hairy texture. The flowers have five petals.

A. From your description, the tree sounds like Mexican olive (Cordia boissierie). It is not a true olive, but produces an olive-like fruit. Mexican olive is drought-tolerant. It will freeze back to the roots during cold winters, but grows back quickly. Grow Mexican olive as a specimen in full sun. It blooms over a long season, all spring through fall.

Q. Our gladioli are blooming now. We notice that we missed digging up some of the bulbs last summer, but they seem to be growing and blooming just as well as those we replanted. Is that because the weather this year was special or could we just leave the bulbs in the ground all winter?

A. I have left mine in place for the last few years and they seem to do fine. Up north, we dig them up because the soils freeze, but it looks as if we can leave them in place in South Texas.