Q&A

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Q. How do we keep the newly planted tomatoes from dying in this heat? We used the Surefire in the six-pack and half of them died. The others don’t look good.

A. Tomatoes can tolerate lots of heat if they are in cool soil and receive adequate moisture. Plant them a little deeper than the peat pot or soil ball and water them every day. To keep the soil cool, cover the soil with two inches of mulch. Live oak leaves, compost, shredded brush, and small bark pieces work well.

When you irrigate the whole root ball must be wetted so the water must be applied at the base of the transplant. Drip irrigation will work but I alternate a drip application with an application with a water wand.

Another issue with tomatoes in peat pots is that the peat pot must be thoroughly soaked prior to planting and it must not emerge from the soil when planted. If the peat is dry at planting it can be hard to the point that it does not let the roots emerge from the pot. If the peat wall emerges from the soil, it can serve as a wick and quickly dry out, again becoming a barrier to root development.

When it is as hot as it is now be careful if you plant the tomatoes in small containers (one to two gallons). The wet soil in such situations can heat up enough to cause root rot. Shade the containers or plant in larger light colored containers.

Q. Are the live oak leaves that are falling from my trees indicative of a problem? Should I fertilize and water more?

A. The leaves are dropping as the trees adjust the leaf load to a level that the tree can support in the midst of this heat and dry weather. The crown was especially full because of the generous rains we had this winter and spring. Do not fertilize. Extra water may reduce the drop but it won’t be enough to prevent it completely. In the long term the tree will be fine.

Q. Is there still time to plant a Bermuda grass lawn by seed this summer?

A. Yes, if the grass is applied to a well prepared site and you can irrigate twice per day, the seed should germinate in 4 to 5 days and it may be ready to mow in a month. The irrigation application can be shallow.

Q. How do we control fire ants in the vegetable garden? They are making picking the okra impossible. My acephate and Amdro fire ant bait don’t seem to allow application in the vegetable garden.

A. The Amdro bait can be applied in the areas surrounding the garden but it is slow to accomplish control. Look for a product with Spinosad (Conserve) as the active ingredient. Review the label but at least some formulas allow use in the vegetable garden.