Question and Answer

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Q. We planted a row of knockout roses. They had done well but now they are dying one by one. To make them easy to water, the roses were planted in a bit of a trench. Sometime the water sits on the ground in the trench after heavy rains. When I check the plants that have died, I can just be pull the plants out of the ground. What is the problem and what can we do to stop the remaining roses from dying?

A. Your problem sounds like a case of root rot caused by soggy soil. Roses require well-drained soil. Even tough roses like knockouts require well drained soil such as that provided by a raised bed. The remaining plants need to be dug up and replanted in a bed where water does not accumulate. You may be able to hill-up the trench area.

Q Is there anything that can be used to control cat’s claw and Smilax vines? They are thick on our wrought iron fence and the shrubs in the shrub border.

A. The classic control is a product such as Remedy with Triclopyr as an active ingredient. Remedy is volatile so be careful where you spray it but if you can follow label instructions and spray the foliage on the fence, Remedy will kill it, roots and all. If the rogue vines are in amongst desirable plants they can be cut 4-6 inches above ground level and then apply the Triclopyr in the form of Vine and Stump Killer to the fresh pruning cut and 6 inches of stem.

Q. So which tomato has performed the best this spring? I grew Red Deuce, Tycoon, Valley Cat, and Celebrity. All of them seemed to do well. Can we use them again this fall?

A. Based on the anecdotal evidence provided by the listeners of the radio show, “Gardening South Texas”, most gardeners have shared your success with the recommended varieties on your list and others such as Solar Fire. In the Top Tomato Contest at Milbergers in San Antonio, a brace of Tycoon tomatoes won the top prize and the heirloom tomato, Cherokee Purple won second prize.

This fall go ahead and use the varieties listed but try and plant transplants by the 3rd week in July. Also use some fast maturing varieties such as Surefire, BHN 968(cherry), and Roma.

Q. I am sick of weeds in my Bermuda lawn. What is the best grass variety for crowding out weeds? I may start over with a new lawn if you think there is a better choice.

A. The 2 best lawn grasses to resist weeds are St Augustine and Zoysia grass but only if there is enough soil, sun, and irrigation. You also have to mow at the right height. If your Bermuda lawn is in full sun, there is about 6 inches of soil and you mow frequently at 1.5 inches high, it should compete well against weeds as well.