Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. We were wondering about pumpkins. Can we grow our own for Halloween? They are so expensive to buy already grown.

A. It is difficult to grow pumpkins in Central and South Texas. They are a long season crop, 120 days from seed to harvest for the largest selections. They can tolerate heat in the day but need cooler nights. If you want to try, check the seed rack at your favorite nursery for a variety that can produce in less than 90 days. Grow them in full sun and allow lots of room.

Q. I am tired of zinnias in my cut flower garden. When can we plant snapdragons? What about marigolds?

A. Marigolds can be planted now. The flowers will last until the first cold weather, about Thanksgiving. The issue with marigolds is spider mites. If they are planted now they may survive the spider mite infestation because nighttime temperatures will be dropping in September. Spider mites breed faster in hot weather. The snapdragons can sometimes be planted successfully in late September. Stocks, another good source of cut flowers can also be planted at that time.

Q. We spray the fire ants off of our okra before harvest. There is another insect on the plant that resembles a batmobile. What is it? Should we try to control it somehow?

A. The “batmobile bug’ is a leafhopper. It makes its living by sucking juices from the okra but it is usually ignored. Sevin will control the leafhoppers. If you use it, follow label instructions.

Q. My Meyer lemon is loaded with fruit but the leaves are pale yellow. It is growing in a container which we fertilized with Osmocote this spring and water every week. Should we try to correct the light green color?

A. Yes, add some soluble fertilizer dissolved in water every two weeks or add some more Osmocote. A cup of Osmocote is not too much. Peters, Miracid, or MiracleGro work well as soluble fertilizers. I also recommend that you water at least twice per week. Begin those treatments and the plants should green up fast enough to result in larger lemons by harvest time.

Q. If dry looking grass does not respond to extra hand watering, does that mean the problem is chinch bugs? The yellow areas are in the hottest part of the lawn. How do we treat them?

A. Chinch bugs could be the problem. Rub your hand at the edge of the yellow area to see if you can see the tiny insects in the grass. If so treat with a granular or liquid soil insecticide. The lawn won’t recover until this fall.

Q. Leaves are dropping from our live oaks. Some of the leaves have brown splotches on them but not all. Is it just the dry weather or could it be oak wilt?

A. The leaf drop is probably caused by the hot dry weather. Live oaks and other species put on lots of extra leaves during the wet spring. They are now adjusting the leaf load to a level they can support with available moisture. The splotches are caused by a secondary fungus that attacks leaves that are being dropped. The problem is not oak wilt. For oak wilt symptoms visit the Texas A&M Texas Forest Service Oak Wilt website.