Gardening Question and Answer

Distribute 09-19-2016

Q. In a recent article you identified the butterflies that resemble Monarchs that are numerous throughout the region collecting nectar from mistflower and milkweed as gulf fritillary. Are you sure they are not queens? Queens have white spots on the wings and are more likely to congregate on milkweed.

A. You are correct. Thank you for correcting my error! I am now beginning to see a few Monarchs in the mix as well.

Q.When is the ideal time to divide perennials? I understand that the best way to keep perennials like Fanick’s phlox and Shasta daisies from declining is to start new plants by dividing them?

A. October and November are identified as the best time to divide perennials that bloom in the spring or summer. Yes, one of the best strategies to reverse the decline that many perennials experience in our soil and climate is to divide them every 3 or 4 years. In addition to the phlox, and daisies, German carnations, daylilies, iris, and other perennials benefit by being divided.

Q. I see the nursery still offers some large tomato transplants. Would they produce a crop this fall or is it a waste of time to plant them at this late date?

A. It is very late to plant tomatoes but the large transplants may work if they are a heat setting or fast producing selection like Tycoon, 444, Valley Cat, BHN968, Surefire, Celebrity, Phoenix or Roma. Be prepared to protect them from the first freezing temperatures.

Q. Is there any insecticide that I can apply to my cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower that will prevent damage from cabbage loopers? If I wait and treat with Bt only after the damage begins it seems like they destroy the plants before it works.

A. Usually Bt works quickly and effectively after it is applied but it has a short activity period. How old is your Bt material? Is it a dust? If the container has been open and is old, it may have lost its potency. Try a liquid version application from a new purchase and apply the spray to the foliage where the worms are feeding. Sevin works as a preventative spray if applied every 10 days. Follow label instructions.

Q. Why are pansies not available at the nursery yet? They have dianthus, petunias, snapdragons and alyssum but no pansies.

A. Pansies are more sensitive the spells of hot temperatures that we often experience in September and early October than some of the other cool weather annuals. It is best to wait and plant them after mid-October.

Q. Should we change the mowing height of the grass for the winter? I seem to remember such a recommendation in days gone by!

A. There does not seem any advantage to changing the mowing height in the winter. Many of us control winter weeds in the lawn by mowing them but as long as you continue to mow on a regular schedule the grass mowing height need not be changed. Mow Bermuda grass at 1.5 inches or shorter. Zoysia grass does well at 2 inches tall and St Augustine grass prospers at 3.5 inches in summer and winter.