Question and Answer

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Q. We are purchasing a new home to take possession later this winter. We will have to select a lawn grass. There are no trees so it will be full sun. We have 2 large dogs and 3 small children, traffic tolerance will be an issue! We love the look of El Toro zoysia but think Bermuda will probably be more practical. What do you think?

A. Both Bermuda and zoysia have good traffic tolerance but Bermuda is superior in that category. . Both grass species can go dormant in drought but Bermuda grass takes less water to stay green. Zoysia is a thicker sod that is better than Bermuda at competing with weeds. What about using Zoysia in the front yard and Bermuda in the backyard? If the backyard is fenced, Bermuda will better deal with the dog and child traffic.

Q. Our peach trees and pecans have lost their leaves. Can we go ahead and spray dormant oil or is it best to wait until February?

A. January and February are usually the target months but I think if you have the time now and temperatures are forecast to be over 45 degrees F. for 48 hours after you spray, it will work fine to spray now.

Q. We love greens and use a lot of collards, chard and spinach. We are concerned because the spinach has been so slow to produce. We used compost and lawn fertilizer to prepare the soil and the chard and collards are producing a lot as usual. Is there any reason you can think why our spinach would be so slow? The collards have even grown through a looper attack!

A. Spinach is not in the same league as chard or collards in terms of growth rate. It is also more sensitive to warm soil and temperatures. I think many gardeners are having the same experience because of the weather. Be patient, at some point your plants will reach an adequate level of root development and begin producing foliage. Limit harvest each time to one third of existing foliage.

Q. What are the issues with cyclamen? They are beautiful but before I spend that kind of money for a one season plant, I want to be alert to the challenges.

A. You mentioned the first issue, they cost 5 times as much as a pansy transplant. Cyclamen require cool weather and shade plus moist but not soggy soil. Another issue is that the stalk is not very flexible. If your dog or cat walks on them, the top is likely to break- off from the roots. The last issue to consider is that the blooms will freeze off in temperatures somewhere under 30 degrees F. The plants won’t die but they are slow to rebloom. Even with all those issues, they are one of my favorite plants for the winter landscape!

Q. What is the plant that is putting up the lush green foliage now? It grows in clumps. We saw it growing in the shade and sun at a resort where we attended a reception. There were deer everywhere but they didn’t seem to eat the foliage. My wife thought the foliage looked like daffodils, but we have never seen daffodils naturalized in this area.

A. There are a few daffodils (Golden Scepter, Trevithian, Campernelle) that will naturalize here but I think what you saw were paper whites that are closely related to daffodils. They will be blooming soon. Paper whites do not bloom for a long period but they are attractive and invincible.