Gardening Question and Answer

Distribute May 30, 2016

Q. Tell me about the suckers (seedlings) that come up near the base of my live oak trees. I take it most of them are suckers off of the roots because they are impossible to pull up by the roots. Can I mow them town or cut them with the string mower without fearing oak wilt. Is there any herbicide or alternate strategy that is better?

A. You are right, the sprouts near the trunks of live oaks are root sprouts. They are especially prevalent with some trees and in shallow or compacted soils. The best tactic is to mow them with the lawn mower or string mower. Research indicates the cuts are not an entry for oak wilt spores because the cuts are close to the ground and very small diameter. The tree is able to protect itself by moving chemicals to defend the small diameter wound. There are no herbicides that can be used to reduce the sprouts without threatening the parent tree. One alternate strategy to consider is to plant a bed of Asiatic jasmine as a groundcover at the base of the oak tree. The jasmine looks like the sprouts and the sprouts only need to be cut when they grow higher than the groundcover.

Q.Is it too late to fertilize my St Augustine grass? It has only become the dominant plant in the lawn recently since the winter weeds declined. It also looks like there is rain in the early summer forecast.

A. Yes, with the rain, the season for useful fertilization has been extended. Consider using a slow-release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 for you St Augustine, zoysia or Bermuda grass. Another reminder on the lawn, now is the time to apply the second application of pre-emergent herbicide to prevent sand burs. Use Amaze, Crabgrass Preventer, XL, Halt or Dimension.

Q. What was that spider mite preventative you recommended for tomatoes? My plants are loaded with fruit and it looks like the spider mites are moving in!

A. Hopefully, it is not too late. Mix 2 tablespoons of seaweed extract in a gallon of water and spry it twice per week under the foliage. The treatment will usually slow down the expansion of the spider mite population long enough to harvest the crop (end of June).

Q. Stink bugs are attacking my tomatoes and peaches. I have tried neem oil and a water spray but they don’t seem to work. Is there another option? What about the fruit that the stink bugs have already scarred, can they be used?

A. In my experience Sevin (carbaryl) works well to control stink bugs and is the only insecticide that does the job. The texture of the fruit will be affected but you can eat the fruit. If you use Sevin you must wait 48 hours after application before eating the fruit. Review the label to make sure I am right.

Q. If I collect the seed pods from my sweet peas can I plant them next fall?

A. Yes, collect the full-size seed pods once they show some browning. Place them in a paper sack. The pods will complete their drying and release the seed into the bag.