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**“Fire Ant Q & A”**

Q. How do I control fire ants in my okra? Most insecticides cannot be used for fire ants in in the vegetable garden.

A. Check the label on Conserve and other organic insecticides that are labeled for fire ants. Another option is to apply a bait, such as Amdro, near the garden but not in it. Ants in the surrounding mounds will be controlled. It also works to spray the ants off with water long enough to complete your harvest every day.

Q. Is Floratam still the best choice for a St. Augustine variety? I have dead areas in my lawn that I need to repair.

A. In my opinion, Floratam is the best St. Augustine variety. In a study that subjected the grasses to 60 days without irrigation, conducted in San Antonio, this St. Augustine variety stayed green longer and greened up faster. Floratam also has a superior resistance to plant diseases such as brown patch.

Q. Will the caterpillars eating on my live oak leaves permanently hurt my trees that are 5 years old?

A. Every spring many live oaks are subjected to caterpillar attacks on the new leaves. Healthy, established trees survive the attacks fine. If your trees are small and can easily be sprayed, an application of a Bt product, such as Thuricide, Dipel or Bio Worm Control, will kill the caterpillars. Eliminating the caterpillars may contribute to the growth rate of the trees, because the leaves can get busy producing growth by converting sunlight, water and nutrients rather than replacing leaves.

Q. Is it better to have a birdbath close to shrubs and other cover or far away?

It is best to have the birdbaths a moderate distance from cover. You want it too far for cats to hide and be able to launch themselves at the drinking birds but close enough that bathing birds can reach cover to escape hawks. I think 6 to 8 feet works well.

Q. What is the best heirloom tomato for this area? I know it is too late to plant for a summer harvest, but I want to be ready for an autumn crop.

A. Cherokee Purple fares well in the Milberger’s Top Tomato Contest, and our Gardening South Texas radio listeners say good things about it. It produces large, tasty tomatoes in the spring. It may be worth trying in the fall if you can find transplants.