**WEB**

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**“Oak Wilt Q&A”**

Q. We have a live oak tree that has dead areas where the leaves turned brown. The arborist who visited the tree said it was not oak wilt. He said the symptoms are caused by the drought and complicated by our removal of the root suckers, a weed barrier over the roots and our use of weed and feed. He says that if we change our practices the tree will recover. What do you think?

A. The weed barrier, if it blocks moisture penetration, and the weed and feed are not the best practices for healthy tree growth but they do not usually kill a large live oak. Removing root suckers by mowing is a common practice that does not stress the tree.

It is good news that the arborist does not think the problem is oak wilt, but I am uneasy about the rest of the diagnosis. It sounds like a root problem or a response to construction activity. His suggestion to see what changes in a month is a good one. Then, the cause of the problem may be more evident. There is nothing to do between now and then if it is root rot.

Q. Remind us again which tomatoes to look for in the fall.

A. Look for heat-setting, fast-maturing selections such as Surefire, Early Girl, BHN 968 (Cherry), Solar Fire or Phoenix. If you can find large plants of Tycoon, Tigress, Celebrity, Valley Cat, 444 or 602, they also may be able to mature a crop before cold weather arrives.

Q. Our lawn has areas in the hottest, sunniest part of the lawn that look moth-eaten. It is Zoysia grass. What do you think the problem is?

A. Zoysia is sensitive to shallow soil in droughty periods. Check if the soil is especially shallow, less than 4 inches, under the dead areas. A good test for this problem is to hand water three times a week. If the grass recovers with the extra water, plan on adding compost to the area to increase soil depth.

Another possibility is that you have chinch bugs. They are difficult to see, but they suck the juices from the grass blades in the hottest part of the lawn. Apply a granular soil insecticide. For information on how to detect chinch bugs, visit plantanswers.com.

Q: You recommend multiple bird baths as a water source for birds and even squirrels. Why isn’t that a problem for mosquito breeding? There are so many diseases associated with mosquitoes; it scares me to have standing water.

A: A typical bird bath in our climate dries out every day due to birds splashing and evaporation. The mosquito larvae don’t survive in such an environment.