Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. We planted several tropical milkweeds as you recommended to provide egg-laying sites for the Monarch butterflies. They are doing well and have attractive flowers but are loaded with orange aphids. Do we ignore them or is there something we can spray that will control them but won’t affect the butterflies?

A. You have several options. You can ignore the aphids and rely on beneficial insects to reduce the numbers enough that the plant can still produce foliage and bloom. The second option is to use your water hose and spray the aphids off once or twice per week. Avoid spraying the blooms if you can because the water spray will reduce nectar levels for a period.

Q. Do you know why all our pomegranates have a brown type of rot on the shell that extends into the fruit? Can we still use them for juice?

A. Pomegranates have been afflicted with a fungus this year, apparently due to all the rain and cool weather we had through May. Cut off the brown rot area before you eat the pulp or attempt to juice the fruit.

Q.I am getting conflicting advice for my Bermuda grass lawn. It is full of weeds. Should I mow high or low?

A. Bermuda grass does better when mowed at 1.5 inches or less. Any higher than that and you get more stem and less blade. Most weeds also have trouble competing with the grass in a Bermuda lawn when it is mowed frequently (every week) at 1.5 inches or less. Another option is to spray with a contact herbicide. They are formulated for use in Bermuda grass and work well to control weeds.

Q. When is the last time that we can plant fall tomatoes and expect to successfully harvest a crop? Our schedule is too tight to plant right now.

A. The recommended planting time was during the second half of July. If you obtain recommended varieties in 1 gallon containers before mid-September you will probably be successful in beating the cold weather. The fastest maturing varieties are BHN 968, Surefire, Lavaca, and Roma Surprise. Tycoon, Valley Cat, and even Celebrity may make a crop if you can protect them from the first light freeze.

Q. Are there any crape myrtles that will bloom in the shade?

A. Not that I know of! Redbuds bloom for a short period in the spring if they are grown in the shade and Mexican plum will produce some blooms in the shade but most blooming trees and shrubs require sun to bloom.