Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Leaves are falling from our live oak tree and all of the leaves that are falling have little colored bumps on the bottom or top surface. It looks like some type of fungal growth. Is it a problem? Should we treat the tree? We usually fertilize in the spring.

A. You are describing galls. Some types are caused by fungus but most result when tiny beneficial wasps lay their eggs on the leaf and chemically manipulate the leaf cells to grow a protective cover around the developing wasp. The wasps hatch and go about their occupation of eating aphids, thrips and other insects. The leaves function with the galls in place but are not as productive as unblemished leaves. When the tree drops leaves because there is less moisture than there was this spring, the less efficient leaves often go first. They do not hurt the tree and do not need to be treated.

Q.I am interested in controlling the rescue grass and annual bluegrass in my lawn this winter but I realize that I should have applied Amaze about September 1. If I apply it now will it stop or reduce the growth of those weed grasses?

A. It takes a while for the pre-emergent herbicide barrier to act on the weed seeds and we have had some cool weather that likely stimulated germination so I don’t think applying a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent winter weeds now will be very effective. You will have to rely on your mowing to keep them in control. Mark your calendar for next year, September 1.

Q. Leaf-footed bugs are on my tomatoes again. I don’t like the way they cause scar tissue on the skin of the fruit. I have tried all the organic controls without any success and am ready to use a more potent insecticide, if there is one that will work? What do you recommend?

A. I have success with using Sevin for leaf-footed bugs and other stink bugs on tomatoes, peaches, blackberries and peaches. The spray is easier to use than the dust. Follow label instructions.

Q. Just wanted to let you know that we followed your recommendation on how to use Bt on broccoli without hurting any of the flying or larval butterflies (caterpillars) and it worked. I have never seen so many butterflies as this year! We even got bold and sprayed a damp thicket that provides good bird cover with pyrethrum to control the mosquitoes because a newly married young couple were going to visit us. The threat of mosquito borne diseases forced us to compromise our no insecticide rule.

A. Yes, compromises are often necessary and can be accomplished if gardeners are careful to use the least toxic insecticide that is effective. Avoid general spraying in favor of targeting, and follow label instructions.

Q. When will the pansies be available in area nurseries? There are snapdragons, calendula, stocks, cyclamen, dianthus, and even primula, but no pansies.

A. Some nurseries do have pansies, violas, and johnny jump-ups and all should have them available as we move into November. Pansies like cyclamen, and primulas are sensitive to hot spells so are usually planted after November 1.