

Gardening Q&A

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Q. You have been discussing the green cabbage loopers and the brown/green cut worms attacking the garden plants this fall. We have one that is black with parallel golden lines on the sides. It starts small but grows to an inch and half. It is on my rutabagas, collards, zinnias and tomatoes. I tried Bt but eventually got control with malathion. Do you have any idea what it may be?

A. There has been reports of army worms and they would meet your description. Often if the numbers are limited and you catch them when they are small, Bt is effective. These are the same caterpillars that will move across lawns in waves feeding on the grass and everything else in their path. You did not mention it in your description of the caterpillars but the army worms quick roll up and drop from the plant when you disturb them on tomatoes zinnias and other plants.

Q. I saw some bluebonnet seedlings at the nursery last week. It was not clear to me how you would use them. Would you plant them in the raised bed for flowers next spring or do you spread them in the vacant lot for a seed source?

A. Plant them in vacant lots or fields in clusters about 18 inches apart to serve as the seed source of an ongoing bluebonnet bed. They are also fun to grow in containers on the patio as conversation starters for company. Use well drained potting soil and don't over water them. The blue flowers are attractive, but it is even more fun if you include some reds or whites on the patio.

Q. Is it time to harvest the citrus? My lemons look ripe, but the satsumas are still green.

A. Most of the citrus including satsuma, grapefruit, kumquats, calamondins, limes, lemons, and oranges are ready to harvest. They will still get sweeter in some cases, but it is best to begin using them when there are opportunities, so you don't get overwhelmed later in the season. Even citrus that is still green may be physiologically ripe and tasty enough to eat.

Q. The cold wave last week froze my tomato plant tops. The fruit seems to be okay. What is the recommendation?

A. The tomatoes will probably not set any more fruit but there is a good chance the medium size fruit and larger will ripen and even put on some more size. Again, as in the case of citrus use the fruit up. Tomatoes that are full-size and have shown any color change will ripen further after they are picked.

Q. Can we still fertilize our lawn? We were out of town and missed the scheduled time.

A. No, at this point the application would probably not be efficient in terms of the goals of contributing to winter hardiness and a quick green-up in spring. It works as long as the lawn is green and transpiring. The cold weather puts the plants in a less active state.