

## Gardening Question and Answer

02-06-2020

Q. On your radio show you recommend that the spinach, onions, snapdragons and other winter plants be fertilized but not the winter lawn, why is that?

A. The winter vegetables and flowers are growing full speed in the cool weather so they utilize, and in fact must have adequate nutrients to produce flowers and vegetables to their full potential. Your St Augustine, zoysia, and Bermuda grasses are hot weather plants that are in a dormant state or at best, a low growth state in the cool weather. The roots are not active enough and the plants are not growing aggressively enough to take up and utilize the nitrogen in fertilizer at this time of the year. The winter weeds such as rescue grass, bedstraw, and annual bluegrass will welcome the nutrients however! Fertilize real lawn grass about May 1 after you have mowed real grass twice.

Q. We have moved into a new house and are admiring the neighbors fruit trees. I believe there are peaches and plums. Why are some blooming now, and others look dead?

A. Peach and plums (also apples, pears) selections each have a different need for winter cold weather. The trees blooming now are "low chill" varieties. They have received enough cold weather to reorganize their chemistry and begin growth for the spring. Some high chill requiring varieties such as Elberta peaches, red delicious apples, and Bartlett pears are inappropriate to grow in this area because there is never enough cold weather in the winter. Hopefully the "dead looking" trees in your neighbors' yard are just higher chill selections that will bloom later, and more cold weather is experienced.

Q. What can we plant now in the vegetable garden? I see there are tomatoes at the nursery already.

A. Potatoes and onion transplants can be planted now. It is too cold for tomatoes. If you see a special variety of tomato you want to buy, pot them up until mid-March, when the soil will have warmed up. Potting up is to fill a black plastic 1- or 3-gallon container with Osmocote enriched potting soil. Put the potted-up plants in the sun out of the wind. Move them inside if temps are forecast at 40 degrees or less.

Q. Does it make sense to plant snapdragons or stocks this late in the winter?

A. Yes, the winter annuals including snapdragons, dianthus, stocks, sweet peas, and calendula will bloom into May in most years.

Q. Our Texas mountain laurel is blooming now. Last year it was stripped by caterpillars. How can we prevent the same damage this year?

A. Keep a close watch on the plant and have a Bt product such as Bio-worm Killer or Dipel on hand ready to be mixed and spray on the plant. At first sign of any foliage damage spray the plant with the Bt.

Follow label instructions.