Gardening Question and Answer

Distribute 09-05-2016

Q. What insecticides are they using for mosquitoes in Florida and here in Texas to stop the Zika Virus? On the news it looks like they are doing a lot of general spraying. How will that effect birds and beneficial insects?

A. From what I can discover it appears they are using malathion and premethrin. Malathion has been used for mosquito control for several generations. It does kill beneficial insects such as honey bees. We are between a rock and a hard place when it comes to mosquito control. They carry many diseases and must be controlled. So far, general spraying of potent insecticides is the most effective way to control them.

Q. Can we plant potatoes this fall? When?

A. The usual time to plant potatoes is in early February for an early summer harvest. Some gardeners plant potatoes in September with hopes of enough mild weather to produce a crop. Potatoes are hot and cold weather sensitive.

Q. We have a new home and landscape. We also are blessed with deer. What shrubs can we plant that the deer will not eat? Are any shade tolerant?

A. In the sun, plant Texas mountain laurel, thyrallis, esperanza and pomegranate. In both shade and sun consider standard and dwarf yaupon holly, standard pittosporum, boxwood, nandina, primrose jasmine, Mexican honeysuckle, and viburnum. For more information on each of the plant species visit plantanswers.com.

Q. How long will our zinnias, marigolds, begonias, and penta keep blooming. When can we plant snapdragons, stocks, pansies and the other cool weather annuals?

A. The warm weather annuals will often bloom all the way to Thanksgiving but you can plant cool weather annuals such as snapdragons, stocks, dianthus and calendula in September. Wait until October or November for pansies, cyclamen and primula.

Q. Last year my fall tomatoes were devastated by hornworms. By the time I figured out what was causing the damage, they had stripped the plants. What could I spray them with to prevent the same damage this year?

A. We usually try to keep a close watch on the plants and as soon as any foliage feeding is noticed, spray with a Bt product. If you are troubled with hornworms and stinkbugs, a preventative spray of Sevin every 10 days would work for both of the tough to control insects. Follow label instructions.

Q. I understand it is recommended that we fertilize our lawns on or about October 1. What type of fertilizer should we use for most efficient feeding?

A. I recommend use of a “winterizer” lawn fertilizer with a formula of 3 parts nitrogen, 1 part phosphorous, and 3 parts potassium source. Formulas such as 15-5-10 or 16-8-12 work well. If you have open bags of slow release lawn fertilizer from this summer, use it for your winter flower and vegetable garden.