Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. What does it mean if my Bt spray is not controlling the cabbage loopers on the broccoli? I have resorted to picking as many off by hand as is possible. Will spinosad, Sevin, or malathion work better?

A. This has been a tough year for cabbage loopers, cutworns, leaf rollers, and even hornworms. Are you mixing it according to the requirements on the label? The killing action occurs when they consume the Bt as they eat the leaves so it must be spread over the feeding area. Is your Bt product relatively fresh? If it is more than a year old and has been open, you may want to get a fresh container. The usual problem, however, is that the spray is not applied to cover the bottom side of the leaves. Add 2 tablespoons of dish detergent to the mix to help it spread better. All 3 of the products you list will kill loopers but are usually not as effective as a Bt spray. The one thing they do better is to provide a longer period of some control.

Q. We were at a neighbor’s home last week and noticed a vine with daisy size orange blooms that were spectacular. It was growing in partial sun and was covered with Monarch butterflies. . We didn’t get a chance to ask what they are called. Do you have any idea from my description what it is?

A. I believe it is Mexican flame vine, a perennial that blooms in summer through fall. This year the plants I am familiar with didn’t start to bloom until late. They may bloom into a mild winter but is root hardy most winters. You can buy transplants or use seeds. It does well in large containers. The Mexican flame vine also grows in full sun.

Q. We just bought a new home. We have Labradors and no lawn. There are a few trees in the yard but it is still sunny. What is the best lawn for the dogs and the light situation? Is Bermuda the best? Can we seed now?

A. Bermuda grass has the best traffic tolerance but requires full sun to prosper. Zoysia grass has the second best traffic tolerance and can grow in partial shade. If you decide to use Bermuda grass you will have to use sod because the seed requires warm soil and air temperatures to germinate. You can begin seeding again about May 1. Zoysia grass is available in sod. Consider El Toro or Jamur.

Q. Our zinnias have been great this year and are still blooming. The butterflies love them. The plants get mildew and decline but by then new plants have germinated from the dropped seed. Can we collect some of the seed from our favorite colors and plant it next spring?

A. Yes, zinnia seed can be collected and planted next spring. To have most success with the early plantings (March) plant the seed in a tray filled with potting soil. When the soil warms up, the seed can be planted directly in the garden.

Q. We are getting prepared to protect our tomato plants from the first few cold fronts that move through. What works best- blankets, agricultural fiber or the “Planket” product?

A. I like blankets or fabric covered by a “Planket”. The 2 layers work well and the “Planket” has some moisture resistance. Have a heat source ready for temperatures at 28 degrees or less. A mechanic’s light or poultry lamp work well.