Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Our poinsettia is getting some wilted crinkly leaves. We keep it watered with the 6 ice cubes every day and a soaking in the sink every weekend. What else could cause the problem?

A. If the soil is kept moist but not soggy look for one of these other issues. Is the plant close to a heat register? The flow of hot air will cause leaf damage. How about a draft from outside every time the door opens? We had some freezing temperatures in December. Could the plant have been exposed to cold drafts or freezing temperatures? Is the plant positioned in front of a window where it is exposed to western or southern blasts of sun?

Q. Just wanted to tell you that we still have a rufous hummingbird coming to our sugar water feeder and that we have started to see American goldfinches at the thistle seed feeder. The rough weather they had up north earlier in the month must have motivated the goldfinches to seek milder temperatures.

A. Thank you for the report. The cold weather in the second week of December also stimulated action at my feeders. It must have been harder for the insect eaters to find prey because mockingbirds, kinglets, wrens, woodpeckers, and orange-crowned warblers have been spending more time at the suet feeder.

Q. One good thing about the colder weather is that the loopers and foliage eating beetles are less prevalent in my gardens. Those beetles attacked the snapdragon blooms and even the chard leaves. What were they? What controls them? The Bt worked on the loopers but did not phase the beetles.

A. I can’t be sure but they may have been one of the weevils or flea beetles. Bt only affects caterpillars that feed on foliage where it has been sprayed. Products with malathion and perhaps pyrethrin (organic) as the active ingredient will control the beetles. Be on your guard, the loopers and beetles may return this winter.

Q. We planted bluebonnet transplants in November. They don’t seem to be growing. Should we fertilize them?

A. A little fertilizer in early February will be utilized but right now the bluebonnets are in their “rosetting” stage. They are growing roots to prepare them for a growth spurt in early spring. Be patient.

Q. When can we plant potatoes? Is it still a good time to plant onion plants?

A. Plant potatoes in early February. Visit plantanswers.com for detailed planting information. Yes, it is still a good time to plant onions. Use transplants planted 2 inches apart in full sun after the soil has been prepared by adding 4 cups of lawn fertilizer over every 100 sq. ft. of bed.