

## Question and Answer

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Q. I just spent some time reviewing the toxic plant list. It is huge and includes lots of common landscape plants. Why don't more dogs and cats poison themselves?

A. There are lots of reasons why pet poisoning from landscape plants is not very common. Most pets are too smart to consume poisonous plants, berries and seeds. Also a blanket statement that a plant is toxic is misleading. Salt is toxic but you have to consume large amounts before you would be affected. Pets may taste edible looking plant parts but they are warned off by unpleasant tastes or nausea long before any permanent damage occurs. In some cases such as for Texas mountain laurel seeds, the hard shelled seeds usually pass through the pets system without any access to the poisonous innards. According to my veterinarian the main threat to pet poisoning in this area is Sago palm seeds.

Q. We have had a great tomato season. We used the recommended determinate varieties like Tycoon, Phoenix, 444, HM 1823, BHN 968, and Red Deuce. The fruit was large and there was lots of it. Now though the leaves are dropping and we are seeing some white wounds on the fruit. Is the white areas sunburn? The fruit is smaller now and the birds are damaging more tomatoes. Is this an indication that we are at the end of the spring tomato season?

A. Exactly, it is time to pick all full size fruit to let it ripen in the house. If the plants are left in place you can expect spider mites and plant diseases. Pull the plants and plant the new fall tomatoes in late July.

Again use determinate, fast producing varieties that can set fruit in the heat. Look for HM123, Tycoon, BHN968, Red Deuce, Roma Surprise and a new cherry tomato, Ruby Crush. The race now is to beat the cold weather.

Q. There seems like there are less butterflies this year than last. What do you think? Is there a reason?

A. I think we had more rain and more foliage last year which resulted in more butterflies. There is still a good population to observe and if it rains more this summer and fall, the numbers can recover quickly.

Q. My figs are ripening slowly over a long season compared to last year. The result is that the birds are getting most of them. Is it the hot dry weather?

A. Yes, I believe that slow ripening is common this year because of the dry May and June weather. It will be especially true if your figs are not mulched and irrigated.

Q. We have St Augustine grass on about 8 inches of sandy soil. It is drying out. How often and how much do we need to water it to keep it green?

A. On sandy soil apply one quarter inch of irrigation three times per week. On heavier soil apply about 3/4 inch once/week. If the temperatures stay at 95 degrees or more increase the total application to 1

inch/week on both types of soil. You can also supplement areas that are especially dry with some hand watering.

Q. The nursery is only offering the smaller zinnias which don't seem to do as well in the heat and are not nearly as showy or good for cut flowers. Is seeding practical?

A. Yes, zinnias germinate and bloom quickly after seeding. Try the Cactus and California Giant varieties.