

Gardening Q&A

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Q. It seemed for awhile after the 2 weeks of freezing weather that the winter weeds would pass up this year but now they are trying to make up for a slow start. Bedstraw, thistle, and henbit are especially thick. Is there a good spray that will work on them before they take over my whole lawn?

A. The best contact spray for broadleaf weeds in the winter seems to be "Weed-Free-Zone" by Fertilome. It functions at lower temperatures than some of the other products. It is available in a hose end sprayer that you can spot spray the lawn or spray areas covered with the weeds. Don't forget that Bluebonnets, snapdragons and Brussels sprouts are broad-leaf plants just like thistle and bedstraw. Follow label instructions.

Q. The snapdragons have resumed blooming just as you predicted. Should we fertilize them again? What other kind of attention will they need? How long should we expect them to bloom?

A. Expect the snapdragons cyclamen, stocks, pansies, and primula to bloom at least until early May. If the weather is still cool, they may bloom well into May. Dianthus, alyssum, and petunias may bloom longer. Yes, fertilize with slow release lawn fertilizer such as a 19-5-9. Weeds will be growing thick now that the weather is milder. Keep the bed weeded. It is also advisable to spread a slug and snail bait to keep those pests in control.

Q. The rescue grass is growing again after a pause because of the cold weather. Is there any herbicide that we could spread or spray to eliminate it? When do we spread the pre-emergent for sand burs?

A. The contact herbicides like Grass-be-Gone and Fusilade will kill the rescue grass and annual blue grass, but it is too late in the season for efficient use. The grass weeds are trying to go to seed and will be dying soon because of the heat. The best strategy is to keep the grass weeds cut down with the mower or string mower to reduce seed production.

There is still time to apply Dimension, Amaze or Crabgrass Preventer as a pre-emergent to reduce sand bur germination. Apply it again at the end of May.

Q. Our Brussels sprout plants have been very productive this winter. Now the sprouts are large and attractive except that they have a gray coating. It looks like they may have aphids? Can we still use them? Any guidance on preparing them when they are in that state?

A. The gray coloration is probably sooty mold growing on aphid "honeydew" (sugary excrement). I peel off the gray leaves and soak the Brussels sprouts in salt water to eliminate the mold and aphids. Because of the cool weather and despite the aphids, the Brussels sprouts are very productive and tasty this winter.

Q. Is there a special pruning paint that I should use to protect my oak pruning cuts from oak wilt infection?

A. There are spray cans of pruning paint that are very easy to use, but even latex paint brushed on works well. Elmer's glue has been used effectively to cover the wounds. The key is to paint them immediately after the wounds are made or discovered. After 5 days the trees defenses are mobilized at the wound. An uncovered wound for the 5 days after it is made is susceptible to infection by spores carried by sap beetles.