Question and Answer

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* Q. We are building a new raised bed as a Christmas present for our grandmother. How deep do the beds have to be to grow the common vegetables like tomatoes, broccoli, onions, and carrots?

1. A raised bed built one used railroad tie high (about 8 inches) works fine if there is some soil under the railroad tie and you have drip irrigation. Two railroad ties high works even better but the construction is much more difficult. One tie can sit on the ground without anchoring, but using two ties requires fastening the ties together with holes drilled for rebar to pass through both ties and be pounded into the ground.

My beds are one tie high. They are filled with a commercial landscape light mix that is refreshed with 2 inches of compost every 2to 3 years.

For a good resource on raised bed management obtain the publication Drip Line Gardening from the website, thehillcountrygardener. The authors are Tom Harris and Ron Csehil.

* Q. We harvested our initial crop of broccoli. How long should we have to wait for the crop of side shoots to be produced?

1. You should be able to start harvesting side shoots 2 to 4 weeks after the large central head is removed.

* Q. This is our first year of gardening in this area. The flowers we are growing – cyclamen, primula, pansies, and stocks look great. We also planted citrus. We are holding our breath waiting for the winter freezes. When does the likelihood of freezing temperatures end?

1. January is the month when we receive our coldest weather. There are sometimes freezes in February but by March 1 we usually have passed the danger period. Even if it freezes most of your flowers should survive without damage. Be prepared to cover the citrus, such as lemons and limes below 29 degrees and the cyclamen if temps are forecast to fall below 30 degrees.

* Q. Our Bermuda grass lawn has quit growing and some areas are apparently brown from the cold. When should we fertilize the lawn for a fast green-up in the spring?

1. It is recommended that the spring fertilizer not be applied until May1. Green-up is dependent on the spring weather and nutrient storage from the fall fertilization rather than any spring fertilizer application. It takes the warm weather grasses, including Bermuda grass, until May1 to develop enough root system and top growth to uptake nutrients from fertilizer in the spring.

* Q. Is it true that mistletoe berries are poisonous? If it is, how can the birds eat them? We have seen mockingbirds and cedar waxwings eating the berries.

1. Mistletoe is toxic to some organisms, including humans, but you are correct, a number of bird species eat the fruit without any negative results. Having a different tolerance for various chemicals is a common characteristic between species in nature.