Gardening Q and A

* Q. Concerning all the leaves that are falling from our live oaks, should we be worried? They don’t usually fall until February.

A. There are lots of plants confused by the weather patterns this year. I believe most of the leaf drop from live oaks is related to the heavy rains last winter and resultant heavy leaf production. The hot dry summer forced a drop of excess leaves, some of which is still occurring. The trees will have plenty of leaves to drop in February and should be in good shape for the summer.

Use the live oak leaves along with the pecan, red oak and other normal leaves that drop at this time, for mulch or in the compost pile. It also works well just to mow them where they lay. The decomposing leaves will benefit the lawn.

* Q. I was going to pull my tomato plants but noticed that they had new growth and even blooms. Is there a chance they will survive the winter and even produce more fruit?

1. There is always a small chance that the plants could survive but it is unlikely. January is usually our coldest month and early February can be cold. I think we can expect freezing temperatures before the winter is over. Overwintered plants will not produce as well as new plants in spring, plus the old plants become reservoirs of insect and disease organisms.

* Q. Our lawn has gotten sparse over the last few years. I have the time now and the inclination to re-sod the barest parts. Is that something that can be done with a reasonable chance of success? Of course, our potential sod supplier says it will work fine.

1. I agree with your sod supplier. Sod applied now to a properly prepared site is likely to take root and do fine, but the first question to answer is why did the sod decline in the first place? The usual reasons are because of lack of water, too much traffic, or excessive shade. If you can’t deal with the issue or issues that caused the decline in the first place, you may want to reconsider investing more money in new sod. The new lawn will revert to the current condition within a few years if the cause of the decline is not addressed. . Shade is the hardest issue to deal with but even accessing enough water or reducing traffic from pets, children or vehicles can be difficult.

* Q. We were at a friend’s home for a holiday party. She had a great rose bed but could not remember the type of roses that were in the bed. She did remember that the roses were tough roses that she never had to spray and only watered once/month. She also said that she got the list of which roses to plant from one of your columns! One of the roses had yellow blooms, and one had a rich pink bloom and rose hips.

1. The pink rose with the hips is undoubtedly Katy Road (Carefree Beauty). The yellow rose is probably Grandma’s Yellow. Two other roses that are included on my list of tough, long blooming, drought tolerant varieties are Belinda’s Dream and Mrs. Dudley Cross. Belinda’s Dream, Mrs. Dudley Cross, and Grandma’s Yellow produce cut flower quality blooms in addition to making great landscape specimens.

* Q. We have cabbage loopers eating big holes in the leaves of our cabbage and Brussels sprouts. My friend, who is a good gardener says to spray the plants with Sevin. I checked the label and Sevin appears to be a manufactured pesticide. Is there an organic product that works to control cabbage loopers?

1. Sevin works fine but the pesticide usually recommended to control caterpillars of any kind, including loopers, is Bt. Bt products include Bio-worm Control, Thuricide, Dipel and many others. Bt insecticides are derived from a bacteria that kills caterpillars that ingest the powder or spray that has been applied to foliage where they are feeding.