Q and A

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Q. What can I do to eliminate the sprouts around my live oak tree. I find the shoots so unattractive I am thinking of removing the live oak in favor of a species that is not prone to sprouts!

A. That is pretty severe solution. Despite the sprouts, live oaks are consider the most desirable shade tree in the area. When they grow in shallow compacted soil some individual live oaks are inclined to produce sprouts. The sprouts indicate that the roots are close to the surface and that the soils cannot support taller trunks. There is not a good solution. I just mow mine every time the lawn is mowed. They can be pruned down in areas that aren’t mowed. Some gardeners plant a bed of shade-tolerant Asiatic jasmine around the sprout-producing tree. The jasmine looks like the sprouts and disguises them.

Q. We have a large garden space and plan to plant tomatoes, green beans, cucumbers, and summer squash this month. Can we also plant sweet corn? Nobody every talks about sweet corn?

A Yes, if you have the space sweet corn is a good garden crop for this area. Fertilize the area well with slow release lawn fertilizer before planting seed in March. Plant sweet corn in blocks (short multiple rows) for good pollination. Blocks can be planted every two weeks so that the harvest is spread over a long season. Visit plantanswers.com for more particulars.

Q. What is the estimated date when we can plant tomato transplants in the garden without having them harden off because of cold soil?

A It depends on the weather but we usually talk about March 15 as the earliest planting date. Gardeners that pot up their tomatoes often keep a few for planting on April 15.

Q. My neighbor does not believe me that using beer traps is an effective strategy to protect primula and other plants from snails and slugs. Please explain how it works.

A. You fill a small plastic cup half full of beer and then sink it in the bed to be protected. The cup’s edge should be buried level with the soil surface. The slugs, snails and pill bugs “dive” into the beer and drown. It usually takes 3 to 4 days for the trap to become filled with the pests. Dump them out and replenish the beer.

Q. Can we discard our bedstraw mats and other winter weeds pulled from the lawn in the compost pile or will we just be spreading the seed to wherever we use the finished compost?

A. If your compost pile heats up in the decomposition process most of the seed will be destroyed. Even is some seed escapes, it will not be a major source of future plants. It only takes a few plants in the neighbor’s yard or the corner of your landscape to mature seed to provide the next years crop! Use the pulled weeds in the compost pile.