Question and Answer

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Q. Our snapdragons have rust- colored powdery speckles on the underside of the leaves. The leaves are discolored. Is it a disease or are they mites? What can we do about them?

A. The symptom you describe is caused by a fungal disease called rust. It shows up this time of the year every year and ends the bloom period for snapdragons. I have not found anything that controls rust on snapdragons. Pull the plants and bury them in the compost pile as soon as the blooms decline to the point that they are no longer attractive.

Q My St Augustine is beginning to grow but the lawn is still overwhelmed by rescue grass, that winter weed that you keep celebrating as a good winter lawn grass. Is there anything I can do at this point to eliminate the rescue grass in order to encourage the St Augustine?

A. The rescue grass has only about a month before it completely declines due to the heat. In the meantime it will work very hard to set seed. The best thing is to keep the lawn mowed. Consider fertilizing the lawn about May 1. At that time the St Augustine should be ready to use the nitrogen and the rescue grass will be beyond any capability to use the nutrients.

Q. What are the holes on our live oak tree? They are about pencil size and all in a row. Is it a problem that we need to control?

A. The holes are caused by sapsuckers, a type of woodpecker. They make the holes to leak out a small amount of sap that attracts insects which the birds eat. The sap is also eaten by the sapsuckers and hummingbirds. The holes are common and are not considered any threat to the tree.

Q. The hail last week chewed up my tomato plants pretty badly. What are my options?

A. Try and find some large transplants as replacement plants. It you are not successful you may just have to let the injured tomatoes send up new stems and foliage. It, of course, will set back and reduce the harvest.

Q. What is the perennial plant that you mention on your radio show that blooms with flowers that have a fragrance like lilacs? Are they readily available?

A. The plant is Fanick’s phlox, one of the Texas Superstars. In addition to the great fragrance, the pink and white flowers are attractive and they are generally pest free. Fanick’s phlox is available at most San Antonio nurseries. Call and check with your favorite nurseries to see if it is available. While you are checking on Fanick’s phlox check out “Whopper Begonia” and ” Brazilian Red Hots Alternanthera”, two new Texas Superstars for the shade garden.