Question and Answer

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Q. Our yard is loaded with butterflies but we also have cabbage loopers on our broccoli plants. We want to protect the broccoli but minimize damage to the butterflies. Is it a Catch-22 situation?

A. No, it is not a Catch 22 situation. Control the loopers by applying a Bt product such as Thuricide or Dipel to the broccoli foliage. Loopers that feed on that foliage will stop feeding and eventually die. Caterpillars must consume Bt to die. The impact only lasts about 5 days and if you only apply it to the broccoli, no other caterpillars or butterflies will be affected. The Bt also works for other vegetables and plants that require protection from feeding caterpillars. Avoid any general application of insecticides.

Q. We have an old vitex tree that we value in our landscape but it is in the way of the project to build a new fence. The fence man says that we can cut it down to the ground so that his workers can more easily complete the work and that it will grow back just as good as before. Do you agree?

A. In my experience vitex does quickly re-grow when it is pruned to the ground. It will probably come back as many shoots, some of which you will have to remove to build a new tree. One issue is that old trees and shrubs are not always as responsive to pruning as young plants but the proposed plan should work.

Q. Rocket snapdragons, the largest variety is my favorite selection but it is getting harder and harder to find. Do you know what the issue is?

A. Rocket is not everyone’s favorite snapdragon. They are hard to manage because they are top heavy and can be damaged by wind and rain. Some nurserymen also report that they are more sensitive to warm weather than the medium sized selections that are on the market. It is easier to grow and plant them after mid- October or November.

Q. We followed your recommendation concerning fall tomatoes and now are harvesting, Roma, Surefire, BHN 968 and Lavaca tomatoes. Roma are very productive but not as tasty as the others, what can they be used for?

A. Roma are used for tomato paste and in cooking but I also like them sliced for sandwiches and salads. If you are not into canning tomatoes, next year only grow a few Roma plants. This year be generous to the neighbors. Everyone will appreciate a few early maturing fall tomatoes fresh off of the vine.

Q. My neighbor has a huge bed of cemetery iris that he is thinning out now. If I take some do I have to plant them now? I want to create a bed but my schedule is hectic right now. His bed is partially in shade but he says they can bloom in full sun?

A. Cemetery iris are great plants for area landscapes. They grow and bloom best in full sun. They are not fussy about soil as long as it does not stay soggy. Plant them so the top of the rhizome is level with the top of the soil. Deer do not eat iris and even when they are not blooming, the sword-like foliage makes an excellent groundcover. Iris can be planted immediately after they are thinned from an old bed. Plant them 18 inches apart. They also can be stored in a paper sack in a shed or the house to be planted next spring.