Gardening Question and Answer

Distribute 10-10-2016

Q. Are there any pines that we can plant in a Central Texas landscape and expect them to live. For about 8 years we had some wonderful Afghan pines and then they all died from disease that I heard wiped out all of them in the area.

A. So far Italian stone pine, Japanese black pine, and Aleppo pine have prospered in the area over several generations. The easiest time to find them in area nurseries is Christmas time when they are sold as live holiday trees. They can be planted in the landscape after they have completed their holiday duties. Other conifers that work well in the landscape are deodora cedar, Arizona cypress, Montezuma cypress and the junipers.

Q. What are the caterpillars that are devastating my reseeded zinnias? Can I use Bt on the foliage to control the caterpillars without harming the swallowtails, queens, Monarchs, gulf fritillaries, and sulfurs that are using the flowers for nectar?

A. The caterpillars resemble cabbage loopers and are probably from one or more of the species in that family. The good thing about using Bt is that it only impacts feeding caterpillars. It won’t hurt the butterflies visiting the flowers. Another option is to tolerate the feeding if there is enough foliage to support a good bloom.

Q. I see that the cyclamen are already in the nurseries. They are just as sensitive to hot spells as pansies, aren’t they? When can we plant them?

A. Yes, it is safest to wait and plant pansies and cyclamen in November when the danger of a hot spell is reduced. The colors and foliage are hard to resist!

Q. Our Tycoon tomatoes are golf ball size. When do you predict that they will be ready to harvest?

A. If the weather continues to be mild you may have mature fruit by mid-November in plenty of time for Thanksgiving.

Q. We were supposed to fertilize the lawn on or about October 1 but we were busy with other issues and didn’t get the job done. What would happen if we fertilized now?

A. It would work as long as the grass is green and transpiring. The movement (transpiration) of the moisture through the roots and out of the foliage is the mechanism that takes up the nutrients and organizes them in the plant. It requires green functioning foliage. Yes, you can fertilize with a “winterizer” lawn fertilizer now.