

## Gardening Question and Answer

Distribute 02-27-2017

Q. Why do some Texas mountain laurels bloom for a long time and are prettier blue than some other Texas mountain laurels?

A. Mountain laurels are grown from seed from flowers that are pollinated from pollen from other plants in the vicinity. Unlike a lot of landscape plants that are vegetatively produced so the genetics of each plant is different. Plant breeders do some selection for color. "Bluer color" is sometimes a marketing pitch.

Q. We visited a friend in San Antonio. While we were there we saw large flocks of cedar waxwings feeding on blue berries on a large shrubby plant with shiny leaves. Do you know what the plant is? Is it available and desirable as a landscape plant?

A. . . Ligustrum (privet) is evergreen, drought tolerant, fast growing and shade tolerant so it gets planted in landscapes. There are a number of species of privet and some are less invasive than others. Research continues for non-invasive privets. The plant you saw was probably an escaped ligustrum. Some species (Ligustrum lucidum, sinense, and japonicum) will grow to 25 feet tall. Ligustrum are a bird favorite but can be very invasive. In neighborhoods where they exist there are seedlings everywhere. Think twice about using privet in the landscape.

Q. I bought tomato plants at the nursery this week and now my neighbor says that they should not be planted in the garden yet. He relates that the soil is too cold. Is he correct? If so, what do we do with them?

A. Your neighbor is correct. The easiest and most effective thing to do is to "pot them up". Obtain one gallon plastic pots and fill them with potting mix. Fertilize generously with Osmocote and place one plant in each container. Place the "potted up" tomatoes in a sheltered location in full sun out of the wind. If the forecast calls for overnight temps to be 40 degrees or less, move them in the house. Plant the tomatoes in the garden about April 1. If you plant them too early, they won't die but they will "harden off" and quit growing. Tomato production will be delayed.

Q. I was cleaning up the vegetable garden the other day and found a number of curled up green and black skinned caterpillars on the soil. I am guessing they are cutworms. Should I try and eliminate them with an insecticide?

A. When I find cutworms I toss them on the lawn where I expect the birds will find and eat them before they find cover. The birds will also visit the garden after you remove the weeds and plant remnants from the last crop. Cutworms feed on plants at soil level and they will also eat foliage just like cabbage loopers. A Sevin spray could be applied to the entire soil surface but it may also kill beneficial insects. The most appropriate treatment is probably to spray the base of transplants with Sevin. Use Bt on greens where the cutworms will feed on the stems and foliage.

Q. What are the recommended sprays for hybrid tea roses? Last year I did not keep up my spray program and experienced thrips, Japanese beetle, and black spot damage.

A. Triforine is the active ingredient used in fungicides to control black spot. Acephate is an insecticide that works well for thrips, beetles and other insects. Organic gardeners may want to try a combination of sulfur products, neem oil and pyrethrin.

Q. Should we be able to see bluebonnet seedlings in our planting by now? What does it mean if they haven't appeared?

A. Yes, on some sites they are showing some early blooms. If the area is a newly seeded site I would suspect that it is in the shade or the seed did not reach the soil because of plant litter or sod. On an established site, I would suspect that the area was mowed before the seed matured or for some reason such as wet soggy soil, the plants failed to produce seed.