

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. My thornless prickly pear cactus is covered by box elder bug- like insects that can fly. There is also lots of white fluffy pea-size material all over the surface. Any idea what these insects and the fluff might be? Are they a problem? Can they be controlled?

A. I believe the white fluffy materials are scale insects. Under that calcium fluff is an insect sucking the juices from the cactus. The box elder like beetles are also probably making their living from sucking juices from the plant. Cactus is tough and it will survive even if you do not take action to control the pests but both insects can be controlled with an application of horticultural oil and acephate. The horticultural oil suffocates the scale. The acephate is a systemic insecticide that will help control the scale and will kill the beetles. Only use acephate if you do not eat the cactus. Sevin can be used with the horticultural oil if you eat the cactus. Follow label instructions on both insecticides.

Q. We have 9 tomato plants and all but one look good and are setting fruit. The one offending plant is small with disfigured leaves and a yellowish color. Any idea what the problem is? Should I treat the plant?

A. The small yellow plant sounds like it is infected with a virus probably spread by thrips. The symptoms you describe fit the usual pattern of a virus. There is no effective treatment. Pull the plant and put it in the garbage or bury it in the compost pile.

Q. The snapdragons in our cut flower garden have quit blooming and have rust spores under the leaves. I know that means that they are done for the year. Can I just pull the plants and put them in the compost pile or do I have to do some type of sanitation process before I plant zinnias in the same garden?

A. Your plan to put the rust-infected snapdragons in the compost pile and then plant zinnias directly will work fine. Zinnias prosper in the heat and do not seem to be affected by rust.

Q. What is a deer proof shrub that I can plant in the shade to form an evergreen hedge at least six feet tall?

A. Sandankwa viburnum fits those requirements. It is very attractive with shiny green oval leaves about 3 inches long. In the spring it has a white bloom that is attractive for a few weeks. Once it is established viburnums qualify as drought tolerant plants.

Q. How can I tell when to harvest the peaches? If I wait too long the birds attack them?

A. Harvest peaches when the background color changes from green to yellow.

Q. So far no sand burs after applying Amaze on March first. When do I make the second application of the herbicide?

A. Check with the label to confirm the date but I believe about June 1 is a good time for the second application. If you have misplaced the information booklet attached to the label, Google Amaze on the internet. The label instructions will be available on the internet.