

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. My neighbor who is an excellent gardener has diagnosed some growing brown patches in my new lawn as caused by Brown Patch Fungus. The brown patches are expanding. They started in low spots and in front of the metal edging that keeps the lawn from spreading onto the road. It also stops the water from draining. How should I deal with it?

A. The diagnosis sounds accurate. The first thing is to cut back on watering. When the night time temperatures become mild it is time to leave the lawn on the dry side. Irrigate once every 2 weeks at the most this time of the year. It is especially undesirable for the lawn to go into the night in a soggy state. You can treat with a soil fungicide such as F-Stop to stop the spread of the disease. The brown areas will quit spreading but may only heal next spring. For the long term, add top dressing or compost to the low areas in the lawn where the disease first developed. Raising the grade in the low spots will reduce the accumulation of water for disease development.

Q. What does it mean if my tomatoes are cracking around the top? The HM 1823 are very productive and matured early but they are not attractive fruit.

A. The HM1823 have proven they are heat-setters but your garden is not the only one where the fruit cracked. It appears to be a function of developing and maturing in the days where temperatures reached 95 degrees for a long period. The assessment for that variety seems to be more capable of producing fruit in severe heat than other varieties but not necessarily producing pretty fruit. The tomatoes are still usable.

Q. When will the live oak leaves fall? I like to use them for mulch in my vegetable garden.

A. You have awhile to wait. In my neighborhood the live oak leaves drop between February 15 and March 15. It depends on the tree and its location as to when they drop. It can also vary from year to year.

Q. What are the best snapdragons to plant? My nursery has two varieties, Rockets and Libertys. What should we grow for color in the shade for the winter?

A. Rockets are much larger (taller and larger bloom heads) than Liberty but they are also more prone to wind and rain damage. They work very well in a large container surrounded by a tomato cage. The Liberty only grow to 30 inches tall. They are more orderly and uniform in the bed. Both make good cut flowers. For the shade, check out cyclamen. The foliage and blooms are spectacular. The one drawback is that they are expensive.

Q. We love to feed the birds, but the squirrels are eating us to the poorhouse! I know you have offered some squirrel options on your radio show. Please review them for us. Thanks!

A. Obtain a steel feeder with weight sensitive perches. The feed access is blocked when a squirrel steps on the perch. You can even set it to exclude white-winged doves and grackles. Another option is to feed safflower seed rather than sunflower seed. Cardinals, titmice and chickadees seem to like the safflower seed, but the squirrels do not.