

Gardening Q&A

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Q. What is the recommendation concerning dormant oil? You and Dr. Parsons were discussing it on your radio show. We have scale on our peach trees and that was one of the reasons to apply it, you said?

A. It is recommended that dormant oil be applied to all fruit trees and roses to control scale, mites and other insects that are on the bark and hiding on the stems. The scale insect sucks the plant's juices. Mites and other insects sometimes carry diseases. The dormant oil label will describe how to dilute the oil (considered an organic control) for effective use. It is recommended that the material be applied when temperatures of 45 degrees or higher are forecast. Also, be careful when applying dormant oil on herbaceous plants like flower borders under the trees.

Q. Will the freezing weather mean that our insect populations will be reduced this spring? I am looking for something good to result after all the uncomfortable dreary weather.

A. Some insect populations will be reduced but the cold is just as likely to reduce the beneficial insect population as the insect pests. Insects like aphids quickly reproduce and out distance the number of lady bugs and other insects that feed on them. When I uncovered my lime trees, I noticed cucumber beetles that also took advantage of the covering and heat sources. It will be interesting to see how the various pest populations are affected.

Q. You will be happy to know that the cyclamen and primula that provide color in the shade in my landscape all made it through unscathed. I followed your recommendation to cover them with a single layer of "Insulate" fabric. As the temperatures dropped below 24 degrees and it stayed below freezing for over 24 hours in each of the last few weeks I became very nervous, the two species are beautiful but expensive and the other flowers in the garden were frozen back. I thought that I should have covered them with 3 or 4 layers!

A. I had the same experience with the cold and the nervousness. In my cutting flower garden, I didn't cover any of the snapdragons, alyssum, stocks and calendula. The snapdragon foliage survived but the rest of the plants were flattened. It was a relief to see how well the cyclamen and primula fared.

Q. We just planted our onions. The nurseryman said that the reason we had a dismal crop last year was that we never fertilized them. He talked us into the "winterizer" fertilizer 18-6-12. Did we do right? We applied 5 cups over the 50-sq. ft. planting area.

A. Yes, generous amounts of immediately available nutrients are essential to produce a successful onion crop. The 5 cups for 50 sq. ft. is the right amount. Every 3 weeks side dress 8 ft. of row with another cup of the same fertilizer.