

Tomatoes, Bermuda Grass and Hackberries

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The normal time to pull your spring tomatoes is early July but some gardeners around the area are pulling them now. Factors that contribute to a decision to pull the plants early include:

if the plants have a limited amount or no fruit left;

If the plants have been infected with foliage fungus and or spider mites;

and the arrival of Stage 2 drought restrictions

In preparation for pulling the plants, harvest any remaining full-size fruit. It will usually ripen on the kitchen counter. If the plants are not infested with spider mites, they can be recycled into the compost pile. If there are spider mites, it is usually best to pull the plants with minimal disruption and then stuff the plants into a garbage sack and put them in the regular garbage. Minimal disruption means to avoid shaking off or dropping any of the spider mites. If there are remnants of the spider mite population spread all over the garden, the pests will find their way on to the fall tomato crop. Many area gardeners irrigate their vegetable garden with drip irrigation which is very efficient, but if the plants are not in a full production mode, even efficiently applied water is largely wasted.

We plant the fall tomatoes in late July.

It is ironic isn't it? The Bermuda grass in your lawn is suffering from the heat and dry weather but that Bermuda grass that is invading the vegetable garden, flower garden and shrub border is spreading as an aggressive weed and taking advantage of the irrigation provided to your gardens.

You can try and pull it up but that is getting more and more difficult as the Bermuda grass root system spreads through the gardens. I think the best option is to use one of the contact herbicides for grass weeds such as "Ornamec", "Fusilade", "Grass-Be-Gone", "Over-the-Top" or "Poast". Review the product labels before you decide which product to use, but all can be applied to kill the invading Bermuda grass (and other grassy weeds) without hurting the broad-leaf plants in your beds.

Apply the product to the Bermuda grass foliage as per the label directions and it is translocated through the plant to kill the roots. For maximum effectiveness the target Bermuda grass must have access to water and be growing vigorously. That is usually not a problem because the grass is invading the garden space to take advantage of the water being applied.

Hardwood seedlings such as hackberry, mulberry, Chinaberry, and vining weeds such as Smilax and catsclaw are other types of weeds that can be addressed now. The usual pattern is to prune the seedlings out of the fence line, shrub border, or perennial bed, only to have the pruned seedlings resprout 5 or 6 weeks from now. How would you like to prevent any re growth of the stems? Check out the product, "Cut Vine and Stump Killer". It is available in an inexpensive package that includes a small brush attached to the bottle cap. Apply some of the "Cut Vine & Stump Killer" with the brush to the

fresh cut stem, and the product translocates into the roots and kills the plant. It can even be used in rose beds if you are careful to limit the application of the product to the cut stem.