

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. Why do we try to start fall tomatoes in July when the temperatures are reaching 100 degrees F. It does not seem reasonable to expect the plants to survive, let alone grow! Isn't it more reasonable to wait until temperatures moderate?

A. It is a reasonable question. The goal is to allow the plant to grow and set fruit before cold weather ends the growing season. Tomato plants can usually tolerate high temperatures as long as they receive enough water and the early planting usually translate into root and top growth that allows the plant to be ready to set fruit as soon as the night time temperatures moderate enough to set fruit (approx. 70degrees F). With temperatures reaching 100 plus you can help by temporarily shading the plant from afternoon sun with a cardboard screen or fabric on the tomato cage. Another option is wait until mid-August and plant a fast maturing small tomato such as Roma Surprise or Surefire.

Q. Our lawn is showing brown areas that are increasing in size. We keep adding more water, but it doesn't stop the growing brown spots. Could it be a disease or insect problem?

A. If the brown areas are in the hottest part of the lawn test to make sure it is not caused by lack of water. When it is 100degrees it is not unusual for compacted areas to dry out. Select a test area to hand water every other day for a week. It should green up if the browning is caused by uneven watering or lack of water. If it does not green up with the extra water, suspect chinch bugs feeding on the grass. They are small, but you can usually see them at the base of the grass plants on the edge of the browning. They can be controlled by a soil insecticide.

Q. The oak trees in our yard have lots of ball moss. You have convinced us that the plant is an epiphyte that makes its living from the air so is not a parasite on the tree. Why are so many of the ball moss clumps falling off the trees?

A. The combination of dry weather and heat followed by some heavy rains and wind results in changing weight relationships and some of the ball moss falling from the tree. Lots of branches also fell from the trees in my neighborhood. The ball moss drop does not indicate any special problem.

Q. Do deer eat blue plumbago? It is such an attractive plant for sun and shade, I would like to use more of it, but we have lots of deer.

A. In my neighborhood the deer eat plumbago but in some situations they don't eat it. You will have to conduct a test. Plant 2 plumbago and see if the deer eat them. To make sure that it is not just curiosity, spray the test plants with Liquid Fence once per week for 3 weeks. And then see what happens. If the deer continue to leave the test plants alone you can plant the whole bed.