

Gardening Q&A

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Q. What does it mean that my Cora vinca turned to mush in the midst of all this rain? I thought they were immune to aerial phytophthora?

A. Even Cora vinca has a limit to how many hours the foliage can stay wet before it succumbs to aerial phytophthora. We have seen plants in similar wet situations before that have melted down. It is an indication that even Cora vinca renowned for its resistance to aerial phytophthora has limits in resisting the disease.

Q. I have already planted my broccoli and cauliflower transplants. They were attacked by cabbage loopers as was predicted. A quick application of Bt (Thuricide) seemed to bring them under control but now I notice there some gray-brown caterpillars that are feeding on the plants. They seem to eat the stems rather than the foliage and don't seem to be controlled by Bt. Do you know what they are and how to control them?

A. It sounds like you are describing cut worms. They live in the soil and emerge to eat foliage and stems of garden transplants. Sometimes Bt will control them but I have had the same experience that you are describing. Spraying malathion on the plant and the soil around the plants will control cut worms if Bt does not do the job.

Q. I know it is late, but I still want to apply a pre-emergent herbicide to try and prevent the germination of some of the winter weeds. With the rains my lawn and the summer weeds have grown tall. Does it work best to mow the lawn down low before I spread the herbicide, or do I spread it over the tall grass?

A. The pre-emergent herbicide forms a barrier at the soil surface to prevent the weed germination, so it is essential that the granules are evenly spread over the soil at the surface. Mow the grass and weeds before you spread the herbicide. Follow label instructions.

Q. My favorite nursery has fruit trees available for purchase and planting this fall. Is it okay to plant them now or should we wait until the spring?

A. In our climate, fall is the best time to plant most trees and shrubs, including fruit trees. The plants have a chance to develop a root system before they must meet the challenge of the hot and often dry summer weather.

Q. We have a bur oak that after 10 years is producing a few acorns. They are huge. Can we just plant them like other acorns in a container with potting soil and expect them to germinate?

A. Yes, cover the acorns in the container and keep the soil moist but not soggy. The best acorns to plant are those you remove from the tree before they fall to the ground. Also eliminate acorns that have holes in the shell or seem to be hollow. In past years bur oak acorns have been quite valuable to tree nurseries. You may get some visits from horticulturists and nurserymen.