

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. The cabbage loopers are devastating my broccoli and cauliflower. I have applied a Bt product, but they keep chewing. What could be the problem?

A. Are you mixing the product at the dilution described on the label and then mixing it up well in the sprayer? How old is the Bt? If it has been open for more than a year, I would get a new container. Did you add a teaspoon of dish soap to the mix and are you spraying under the leaves?

Do you find the green cabbage loopers on the damaged foliage? They should be easy to find. Other leaf eaters could be cutworms or slugs and snails. Spray malathion or Sevin for cutworm control. Sevin is still available at some nurseries. Add slug and snail bait for the slugs and snails.

Q. Why are you continuing to recommend the use of Round-up when it is proven to be such a threat to the environment?

A. Some individuals declaring a product is a threat to the environment does not make it a threat. The value of glyphosate as an herbicide must be weighed against any risk it poses to the environment. Lots of research exists on the product and most of it indicates that it is no risk or a minor risk at worst. Research continues to explore any gaps in the analysis of risk. New findings may change the conclusions. Until then, horticulturists like me must use the existing data to determine the products value and risk. Gardeners also can agree with my conclusions or follow another path.

Q. We have caterpillars on our milkweed now. We just took it for granted that they were Monarchs but after hearing your presentation on the topic, realize they may be Queen butterflies. Please tell us again how to tell the difference.

A. Monarchs and Queens are closely related, and both only lay their eggs on milkweed. Generally (but not always) the Monarchs only lay eggs and produce caterpillars in their visit to South Texas going north from the Mexican wintering grounds. They are in San Antonio now on their way back south. The caterpillars look the same except that the Queen has an antenna-like appendage in the middle of its length. The Monarch has one appendage at each end and the Queen has an extra one in the middle.

Q. Spinach transplants are available at my favorite nursery. Will it work to plant them now?

A. I always have better success waiting to obtain spinach transplants in November. Spinach is sensitive to the frequent hot spells in October and becomes spent and vulnerable to insect pests. Make sure the transplants you purchase are green and lush.

Q. We had a terrible time with bedstraw and other weeds last winter. Is it too late to apply a pre-emergent herbicide to reduce its germination?

A. It is best if the pre-emergent is applied about September 1, but you will get some control if it is applied now. Make sure the pre-emergent you select works for broadleaf weeds. Check the labels for Dimension and/ or Amaze.