

Gardening Q&A

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Q. I was planning to spray the Bermuda grass that was invading my flower garden with the contact herbicide, Vantage. Now the freeze has changed it from green to brown foliage. Does that mean that the contact herbicide won't work anymore this season? If not, will the Bermuda grass weeds be back again in the spring?

A. Yes, that means the herbicide will not be effective on the grass that turned brown from the freeze. Yes, it also means that the Bermuda grass will return to the garden in the spring! Of course, you can expect Bermuda grass to renew its invasions of gardens even if you kill it with Vantage and other grass-killing contact herbicides. It just takes the weeds longer if you kill the current plants. Bermuda grass is persistent.

Q. Our favorite nursery already has onion plants available. There are 6 different varieties including 2 selections of each color red, yellow, and white. Is it time to plant onions? What is the best variety? I only have room for one variety, there seem to be 50 plants in every bundle.

A. If you only have room for one variety select the yellow 1015s or the Legacy, an improved version of the 1015. Plant now. Prepare the soil by incorporating 2 inches of mulch and 10 cups of slow-release lawn fertilizer (19-5-9) for each 100 sq. ft. of bed. Place the onion plants every 4 inches in the row and plan on thinning out every other one for green onions before mid-March. The full-size plants will be ready to harvest by mid-May.

Q. Our red oak and pecan leaves are laying on the lawn now. What is this blasphemy I am hearing about letting them decompose in place?

A. Unless you have an overwhelming quantity of leaves (8 inches deep) they will decompose on the lawn to replace nutrients and provide organic material for the lawn grass. Speed up the decomposition by running the leaves over with the lawn mower. Other environmentally sound strategies are to use the leaves as mulch in the shrub border or for raw material in the compost pile. It is a waste of good organic material to send them off to the landfill.

Q. Which of the shade-loving winter annuals – cyclamen or primula, is the most cold hardy? They are both so expensive that I don't want to gamble on losing them to a freeze.

A. Both are relatively cold hardy but in my experience the primula is slightly more cold hardy. Neither were hurt in the record cold on November 14 in my landscape (23 degrees) even though I failed to cover them. Usually I like to put a layer of Insulate over the blooms when temps under 32 degrees are forecast. The foliage isn't vulnerable, but the blooms can be knocked off and they are slow to return.

Q. Do we dare apply sod to our new home now? Or should we wait until next spring?

A. In South Texas there is very little chance of freeze damage to a new sod applied now as long as the grass is obtained from a reliable source, the soil is prepared, the sod is rolled, and it can be watered.