

Gardening Q&A

Distribute 12-31-2018

Q. The "Festival" strawberries that we planted in November are finally growing and blooming. When can I stop pinching off the runners and blooms?

A. Continue to pinch off the runners. The idea is to have the plant put all its energy into producing a large main plant with lots of fruit. You should have quit removing the blooms on or about Christmas time.

Q. We have what looks like a white fungus powder growing on our peach tree trunk. What is it and should we treat it with something?

A. I think you are describing an infestation of scale insects. They are sucking insects that live within a calcium shell that in some situations looks like a powdery growth. Control scale and other insects hiding in the bark with a dormant oil treatment. Follow the label instructions that includes the requirement to wait until there are two days forecast with temperatures above 45 degrees. The dormant oil is no threat to humans but will defoliate pansies and other plants planted under the fruit trees. Cover them with plastic before you spray with dormant oil if they are planted under the trees.

Q. We just closed on our new home and it needs a lawn laid. Can we use St Augustine sod now?

A. There is some potential for freeze damage but most years you can have success with a late application of sod, even if it is dormant, as long as you receive the grass from a supplier with a good reputation for live, high quality sod, and you prepare the soil, roll the lawn, and are able to water on a regular basis so the roots can grow.

Q. My neighbor has larkspur that has naturalized over the years in his garden. He pulls most of the plants out, so they won't grow over his stocks and snapdragons. Can we transplant some of the seedlings (larkspur) to our flower garden with a hope that they will survive and bloom?

A. Yes, the naturalized larkspurs are easy to transplant into a raised bed garden row or spread out in a vacant lot area like wildflowers. They don't necessarily need fertilization but an initial light application of winterizer or slow release lawn fertilizer will encourage growth and bloom.

Q. Some insect or bird left holes in my red oak tree. I would blame a woodpecker, but the holes are in an evenly spaced set of lines. As far as I know we don't have any neighborhood kids that would do it to weird us out? Any ideas?

A. Yes, it sounds like sapsucker drilling. The woodpecker-related birds drill the holes to allow sap to flow. They feed on insects that are feeding on the sap. The holes are not a threat to the trees. I am not sure why they insist on drilling the holes in orderly patterns, unless they are conspiring with the youth to “weird out” us older gardeners!