

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. Even though it is winter I have active fire ant mounds in my citrus and other containers. How can they be controlled? The fire ant chemicals with acephate say not to use the material on food plants.

A. The ants can be treated with products that have Spinosad as an active ingredient. It is an organic insecticide labeled for fire ant control in gardens. You are right to check and adhere to the requirements of the pesticide label.

Q. Our Florida King peach is blooming well again this year. Last year the fruit was small because we evidently should have thinned the fruit. When and how much should we thin the peaches?

A. On early peaches it is best to thin the fruit when the fruit is very small, pea-size. In years past some peach operations even thinned the blooms to leave one bloom every 4 inches on the stem. It is too late to "bloom thin" but go ahead and thin to 1 fruit every 4 inches as soon as possible if fruit sizing has been a problem and your tree has too many peaches again this year.

Q. We had a butterfly garden for the first-time last years which of our nectar producing plants will return after the freeze? I have not seen any sprouting from the tropical milkweed, mist flower, butterfly weed, porter weed, or zinnias.

A. Zinnias are an annual flower that sometimes reseeds, but you will probably have to reseed or obtain new transplants. You can plant in March. The mistflowers are slow to regrow but pretty reliable. The two milkweeds (tropical and butterfly weed) are not as reliable as the mistflower, but they will probably come back. The porterweed is a tropical plant that probably won't regrow. Obtain some new ones later this spring when the nurseries restock.

Q. When can we plant tomatoes in the vegetable garden? What are the recommended varieties?

A. Plant tomato transplants in the garden after March 15. For the most success use determinate or semi-determinate varieties such as Celebrity, Red Deuce, Solar Fire, 444, BHN 968, Ruby Crush, Tycoon, 602, and Valley Cat. The new Rodeo tomato for 2019 is HM 8849. If you buy your transplants early pot them up in a 1-gallon container. Place the container in the sun but out of the wind until the soil and air temperatures warm up.

Q. We need to prune some of the branches off a live oak tree that hangs over our roof. Can we do it now? How do we protect the tree from Oak Wilt?

A. Yes you can prune the oak tree now if you paint the pruning wounds immediately after the cuts are made. Use pruning paint or latex paint to cover the wound to block the sap beetles that carry the oak wilt spores from introducing them to the fresh wound. Visit the oak wilt website at [texasoakwilt.org](http://texasoakwilt.org).