

Gardening Q&A

Distribute 12-09-2019

Q. We quit feeding the birds last spring on May 1 and have resumed this fall about November 1. We had run out of every seed except safflower seed. We bought new mixed seed, suet, thistle, and sunflower seed this fall. The birds are eating it all except the safflower seed. Would safflower seed become stale and less desirable to the birds by sitting in the storage bin over the summer? Should we toss it and buy some new seed?

A. Birds definitely prefer fresh seed and it has been reported that safflower seed is in that category. Rather than throw it away, offer the old seed on a platform accessible to the English sparrows, doves, and other ground feeders. Be generous so you can move on to fresh seed.

Q. All the leaves have fallen off my peach trees. The trunk and stems are loaded with white coating which was identified as scale. I applied malathion but can't see any results. Is there a better control option?

A. The most effective control option is to spray the scale infested stems and trunk with dormant oil. Sometime between now and February 1 apply the dormant oil when temperatures for 2 days are forecast to stay above 45 degrees. Follow the label instructions and be generous. Note that dormant oil will damage foliage on winter annuals and perennials that grow in the winter. Also be aware that the response to the dormant oil is not immediate. It will work much better than the malathion, but it takes a while.

Q. Why are my cyclamen wilting so frequently? They are planted in good potting soil and they are irrigated with a drip irrigation system twice per week.

A. There are several things that cause cyclamen to wilt. Are they in too much sun? Is the drip emitter too far from the plant to moisten the root area? If you notice cyclamen roots are planted in a heavy potting soil compared to other transplants. To expand, the root system must be watered at the base, so the root ball stays moist. It is probably best for cyclamen to be watered every other day during warm periods and the days immediately after they are planted.

Q. We grow our Mexican limes in half whiskey barrels. They do well but the containers are also popular with fire ants. How can they (the fire ants) be eliminated?

A. Seek out a fire ant control that is labeled for vegetable gardens and fruits. They will have spinosad as the active ingredient. Follow the label instructions. You can also apply a bait like Amdro around the containers when the ants are active in mild weather. It will attract and control the ants nesting in the containers as they seek food outside the containers.

Q. When can we plant potatoes in our garden? Are seed potatoes easy to find?

A. February 1 works well for me. The seed potatoes are not always easy to find. Ask now at your favorite nursery. If they say no, you will have to call around. They can even be found on the internet in a pinch.