

Gardening Question and Answer

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Q. Our tomatoes have done very well this spring. I think they have the potential to continue producing this fall. They are Red Snapper, Tycoon, BHN 968, HM 8849 and all the recommended varieties. They are still producing fruit, but they are partially infested with spider mites now. Surely there is something I can spray to control the mites?

A. There are no effective spider mite sprays once the population has expanded to the point of making the leaves look dusty. The best reaction to spider mites in late June is to harvest all large fruit and pull the plants to discard them in a garbage sack so the mites will not infest your new fall planting in July. Prepare the soil the way you did in March with 2 inches of compost and 10 cups of slow release lawn fertilizer per 100 sq. ft of bed. Use the same selections that were successful in the spring planting.

Q. As part of his graduation award our son received a Northern red oak tree. He has honored us by passing it on to us while he travels and then tackles graduate studies. It is in a container and the leaves are browning, but we want to plant it in our landscape. What are your recommendations?

A. Unfortunately I am afraid a northern red oak will not have an easy time even surviving in our alkaline soil and extreme temperatures. One option would be to replace the northern red oak with a Texas red oak. The Texas red oak can serve as the symbol of your son's accomplishment and prosper in our soil and weather.

Q. We have leaf-footed bugs feeding in our tomatoes. They are there in large numbers and do not seem to be affected by our neem oil or Spinosad sprays. Is there any organic spray that will control them?

A. Not that I am aware of. Leaf-footed bugs and the other stink bugs are difficult to control. I have had success with sevin and malathion.

Q. Tell us again what are good plants to use for color in the shade for the summer.

A. Wax-leaf begonias and the related Whopper begonia, pentas, caladiums, and coleus all work well.

Q. Any ideas about restoring the bloom on my Texas sage? They are 9 feet tall and growing under our oak trees. Can we prune them back to half the height and expect them to bloom again?

A. It sounds like the plants are not blooming because of the shade rather than their height. If they won't bloom at 9 feet tall, they won't be any more likely to bloom at 5 feet tall. Plant new Texas sage plants in the sun or use a shade tolerant plant like Sandankwa viburnum in the shade.