

Gardening Q&A

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Q. I never irrigate my iris plants and this year they all browned back. I am surprised but it looks like the foliage is re emerging now that the rains have returned. Should I be content to let them regrow on their own or should I help with some fertilizer or anything else?

A. As you assume, the iris will recover on their own but it would contribute to the regrowth if you applied a small amount (1 cup/20sq. ft. bed) of slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 in early spring when the foliage is growing strongly.

Q. I read a column you wrote about the hummingbirds passing through our area this fall and all the action we could expect with 3 species of hummingbirds and lots of competition for sugar water and nectar. I have not seen any hummingbirds for 2 weeks now. Have I missed all the action? Should I clean up the feeder and pack it up until March?

A. I would leave the feeders in place and even enhance the action by obtaining some firebush and or porterweed plants for the sun and or penta and firespike plants for the shade. Your favorite nursery probably has some blooming plants available. We can expect action over the next 2 months from migrating black-chin, ruby-throat, and rufous hummingbirds. Do not give up yet!

Q. Remind us what insecticide we should use to protect the broccoli and cabbage from cabbage loopers in the garden.

A. Use a Bt product such as Dipel or Bio-Worm Killer. Every nursery has several products with Bt as the active ingredient from which to select. It is an organic control that is highly effective. Follow the label instructions.

Q. When can we plant spinach? Do we use seed or transplants?

A. Plant spinach transplants at the end of October. It is more sensitive to warm weather than chard, kale, broccoli, and the other winter vegetables.

Q. What would cause a Texas mountain laurel to die? We planted an attractive plant in a 5-gallon container in a low area in our lawn, but the leaves turned brown and fell off. Should we have fertilized or watered it more? Is there a chance that it got too much water?

A. Texas mountain laurels do not need fertilization at planting, and they are very drought tolerant. All plants need some irrigation at planting, but Texas mountain laurels do not tolerate soggy soils and need

to dry out between waterings. The soil sounds like it was not well drained enough to support Texas mountain laurel.