

## Gardening Q&A

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Q. Our tomatoes were doing well. We have Red Snapper, Celebrity, and Tycoon plus Ruby Crush and BHN 968. The cherry tomatoes have been producing for 6 weeks and the large tomatoes for nearly a month. Now, however half of the large tomatoes have spider mites. What is your advice?

A. Keep harvesting the fruit but if the infested plants get loaded with mites and webs you may want to pull the most heavily infested plants. Removing the heavily affected plants will slow the spread to the less affected. If we get some more cool weather that may also help to allow more fruit to mature. We are into the fall season; the idea now is to just harvest as much as the plants and weather allow. I have been spraying my plants with water under pressure thinking it may also slow down spider mite reproduction.

Q. What are the gruesome looking bugs with wide legs on my tomatoes? They are dime size and hang together in large groups. They are reluctant to fly even when I brush them off the plant. I guess I could ignore them if they are not hurting the fruit, but I would prefer removing them! Is there a reasonable insecticide to use?

A. I believe you are describing leaf-footed bugs which are related to stink bugs. They do feed on the juices in your tomatoes and leave scar tissue. If you have any Sevin left, it works to control leaf-footed bugs. I have also had success with malathion. Follow the label instructions.

Q. We recently moved to Texas from the Northeast. We had acid soil and were reluctant to use oak leaves for mulch because of the tannins. Is it different here with the alkaline soil? My neighbor eagerly took the pecan leaves we raked for his compost pile and mulch.

A. Leaves are valuable here in Central Texas for organic material. Use them for mulch or in the compost pile. It even works to let the leaves decompose on the lawn. I am not absolutely sure, but I think gardeners in the acid rain and soil regions have revised their opinion of the value of leaves even if they are a source of tannins and acidity. Organic material is valuable in almost all situations.

Q. We successfully grew sweet peas last year and now I see some of last years seeds have sprouted. Do you think it will work to transplant the seedlings to a different part of the yard where we have a trellis?

A. Yes, for most success transplant small seedlings. Another option is to use tomato cages for seasonal trellises on the old site. The attractive blooms and fragrance of sweet peas makes them desirable for garden beds and for cut flowers brought in the house.

Q. Is it a problem that the leaves dropped from our peach tree when we sprayed it with copper hydroxide as you recommended?

A. No, that is one of the reasons why we wait until after November 1 to spray peaches with copper hydroxide to reduce bacterial infections. It is also time to spray horticultural oil to control scale insects on fruit trees. Follow label instructions.