Gardeners' Q&As for July

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office

PHOTO BY **William M. Johnson**

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Dr. William Johnson is a horticulturist with the Galveston County Office of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service. Visit his website at http://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/galveston.

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Question: Can you identify a plant I have seen growing in several local landscapes? It started blooming near the end of May and it's still putting on an eye-catching flower display. The flower heads are round, baseball-size and produced on long slender stalks and the individual flowers are blue.

Answer: The botanical name of the plant you described is Agapanthus and it is also known as Lily of the Nile and African blue lily. Agapanthus was introduced to this country from South Africa in the seventeenth century. Its botanical name is derived from Greek and translates roughly as "flower of love."

Agapanthus bears large, round heads of blue flowers on long, stout stems. The primary bloom period occurs between late May and early July. Most varieties have blue flowers which range in shades of light blue to intense blue. Varieties with white flowers are also available. Agapanthus is also available in standard and dwarf varieties.

The evergreen leaves of the standard varieties are long and strap-shaped and look like large amaryllis leaves. Each flower is borne on a stalk that may be three feet tall or taller. The dwarf varieties are about half the size of the standard varieties.

Agapanthus is an underutilized perennial in local landscapes. While it is typically grown in beds, it may be grown in large containers. Agapanthus needs a well-drained soil with high organic matter. During periods of dry weather conditions in the summer, be prepared to give Agapanthus ample water. During the winter season, provide irrigation as needed to keep the soil from becoming very dry.

Question: I have just finished staining the siding on our house. Now large bees are trying to drill holes in it. What can I do to stop this before they ruin my siding?

Answer: Carpenter bees have once again returned to drill holes in wooden fences, decks, siding, and around the eaves of homes. These large black and yellow bees resemble bumble bees but differ because their tail section is shiny black. They have a powerful set of jaws that can chew a perfectly round one-half inch diameter hole into wood.

Carpenter bees usually attack unpainted and stained wood. It is the female bee that drills the holes and each hole is stocked with a pollen ball and later sealed off after she has laid an egg.

Where is the male carpenter bee during all this? He is flying around harassing, trying to keep you away from the female as she constructs her nest. But he is incapable of stinging.

There are no repellents to stop them; however, you can spray products containing Sevin or pyrethroids. Insecticides will have to be reapplied as needed since carpenter bees can be active through midsummer.

Question: Will the fertilizer, fungicides, and insecticides that I purchased this year still be good for use during the 2016 growing season?

Answer: Your fertilizer will not only be good in 2016, it should also be good for several years thereafter if properly stored. Granular fertilizers do not lose their "strength" or nutrient value unless they absorb moisture or otherwise become moist. Keep fertilizers dry by storing them a few inches above concrete floors and well away from other areas where moisture may be a problem. As an extra precaution against moisture, bags should also be placed in heavy duty plastic garbage bags.

As for liquid-type fungicides, insecticides, and other pesticides purchased this year, they should be effective next year so long as the contents have not crystallized and settled to the bottom, or have not turned cloudy or dark. Granular or powdered type pesticides generally have a longer shelf life than liquid pesticides as long as they are kept dry.

The storage life of pesticides is affected by a number of variables. Avoid long-term exposures to strong light since light accelerates the degrading process. Many gardeners store pesticides in the garage where high temperatures occur during summer months. Exposure to high temperatures will also cause a pesticide to lose its effectiveness. Do not store pesticides inside the living area of a residence.