

COASTAL GARDENER
Franklin Laemmlen, Ph.D.

Correction: In the May 24 Coastal Gardener Column I made reference to the avocado variety “Haas.” I must admit to my readers that I have been referring to this avocado by that name since I was a young man growing up in the central San Joaquin valley. A reader informed me that the correct name of this avocado is “HASS.” The name honors the developer, Rudolph HASS, who resided in La Habra Height, CA, in the 1920s. The variety HASS now makes up over 95% of avocado production. My thank-you to the Nipomo reader for making this correction.

Q: I planted several zucchini squash in my garden. They are growing fine and producing many flowers; however, the fruit gets about 3-4 inches long and then rots at the tip. What is wrong?

A: The fruit is not getting pollinated. Squash plants are monoecious (moun-e-she-us), which means they have male flowers and female flowers on the same plant. However, if pollen does not get from one to the other, pollination and fertilization does not occur and the potential fruit aborts. The pollen must be moved by insects (bees, flies, etc.) or yourself. Apparently, you have little or no insect activity in your yard. Therefore you will have to pollinate the female flowers. In the morning, carefully pick a male flower and remove the corolla (petals), then using it like a Q-tip dust its pollen onto a female flower. Usually one male flower will provide enough pollen for one female flower.

Q: This “huge” reddish brown beetle flew into my window last night. The buzz was quite loud, and the thud on the window sounded like someone threw a small stone. Is this thing dangerous to me or my cat (who wants to eat it)?

A: Your description suggests that you have had the California Prionus experience. This beetle, *Prionus californicus*, can be as large as two to two-and-a-half inches. It is uniform dark, reddish brown and has antennae that are about half as long as its body. The adult is attracted to light at night and sounds like a small airplane approaching. The larvae develop in dead and decaying logs, stumps and roots, and the adults emerge during the summer months. Almost any dead wood will serve as a breeding site. Both larvae and adults are harmless. The adult might pinch you

with its mouth parts if you pick it up wrong. Also, if you don't mind, the insect is very acceptable cat food.

Q: I have planted potatoes in my garden. When can I start digging them?

A: Depending on the variety, potatoes take from eighty to one hundred and twenty days to mature. As a “rule-of-thumb,” I suggest one hundred days to start digging from the date of planting. If you like “new” potatoes, you can try digging early to check their size and maturity. At the time the plant blooms, there will be small edible tubers present, but the full crop potential of the plant is still several weeks away.

Send your landscape and garden questions to: **The Coastal Gardener, 624-A West Foster Road, Santa Maria, CA 93455.**