**Bougainvillea**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

**Texas A&M Water Conservation and Technology Center**

One of the best plants for the patio is bougainvillea. It is available in several versions of pink and red plus off-white, variegated and lavender.

All bougainvilleas are cyclical in their bloom, with a 6 week period of color followed by 3 or 4 weeks without flowers. The red and dark pink seem to have longer bloom periods and shorter colorless periods than the other colors.

Bougainvillea requires full sun to prosper. It is unusual in that it blooms better when the container is allowed to dry to the point of wilt before more water is applied. When you do irrigate, provide enough water so that it soaks the soil and leaks out the drain holes.

The plant also does best when it is well fertilized. Granular hibiscus food or Osmocote type fertilizers do well. Some gardeners even apply a soluble fertilizer like Miracle Grow or Schultz in every or every other irrigation. Under such a regime, it is essential that the soil in the container be well drained.

Another key to maximize bougainvillea bloom is to have it reach a root-bound state. It is easiest to reach this situation if you grow the plant in a 10 or 12 inch container.

Prune the top to be 2.5 times as large as the container and keep it at that size by tipping back the main stems. The tipping also encourages side stems and at the end of each side stem a colored bract will emerge. The actual flower is small and inconspicuous. The desirable color comes from the bracts (colored leaves) that surround the flowers.

If you pot-up (increase the container size) for a bougainvillea expect a period with an increased leaf size and no bloom while the plant concentrates on new vegetative growth to take advantage of larger soil reservoir.

**Gardening Tasks**

Enlist the help of your irrigation contractor to conduct a maintenance review of your system to fix leaks and ensure its efficiency.

Consider obtaining a bird bath or water feature for your landscape. It will increase the wildlife the landscape will support and your ability to observe it.

Consider the two step fire ant control method to reduce the short term and long term fire ant population. Apply spinosad or acephate to anthills near your activities and a bait such as Amdro over the whole landscape. Follow label instructions.

For perennial color through the summer consider esperanza, poinciana, firebush and duranta.