**Q’s & A’s**

**By Calvin R. Finch, Ph.D., Horticulturist and Director**

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

Q: Tell us again how we can recognize if a large tomato will ripen if we have to pick it before a freeze.

A: If the tomato has shown any color change from the dark green to a lighter green, you can expect it to ripen on your kitchen counter. Of course, any hint of orange means the tomato is physiologically ripe and it will turn red in the house.

Q: We have noticed damage on the foliage of our bluebonnets. There are also some small caterpillars evident. Can we just spray them?

A: Yes. Spray with Spinosad or a Bt product such as Dipel or Thuricide.

Q: Our bur oak has produced acorns for the first time. They are humongous, tennis ball-sized. What should we do with them? It seems a shame to throw them in the garbage.

A: The acorns are too large for a bird to consume them whole, but if you crack or crush them, the birds (grackles, doves, blue jays and others) will eat the meat. To crush them, just lay them in the driveway where the car moving in and out will do the job. Deer will eat them and so will squirrels. Pile them in a corner and the squirrels will eventually drag them off to storage. Bur oak is a valuable tree. Plant the acorns or make them available to a wholesale nurseryman.

Q: What is the light green grass that is germinating all over our Bermuda grass lawn and in the shrub border? It is attractive, but will it hurt the lawn? How do you control it?

A: There are several grassy weeds that appear each winter. In my yard, we have rescue grass, but you might also have annual bluegrass. I just mow mine. It makes an attractive winter lawn. Once it germinates, it is hard to kill without hurting your lawn grass. Next August, apply a pre-emergent herbicide, such as Crabgrass Control, XL or Amaze, to prevent it from germinating.

Q: We have several types of birds at our new thistle feeder that are hard to identify. There is a slim black and golden bird and a plumper bird that moves the same but is a drab color. One is sparrow-like with some red on the chest. Can you tell me what they might be?

A: Sounds like you have lesser goldfinches (slim and never lose color), American goldfinches (drab and plump, but active), and house finches (red on chest).