**When to Fertilize**

**San Antonio Express News**

**By Calvin Finch, PhD**

**Director and Horticulturist**

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

We are getting close to the time when we can fertilize the lawn, but try to hold out a few more weeks. Our hot weather grasses—St. Augustine, Bermuda zoysia and even buffalo grass—use nitrogen from fertilizer better if the roots are active. This state is reached after you have mowed real grass twice, usually about May 1.

For the spring fertilization, use one of the slow release lawn fertilizers. The formula 19-5-9 is most common. Half of the nitrogen is released immediately and the other half is released over four months. Apply 1 pound (1cup) per 1,000 square feet of lawn. The bag will tell you the setting on the application.

If you would prefer to use an organic fertilizer, it can be applied right now. Organic fertilizer is all slow release so it takes longer for it to have any impact. You may also want to use twice as much fertilizer if the first number is in the 8 or 9 range. The first number is the percent of nitrogen in the bag.

The recommended mowing height for St. Augustine is 3 inches. Mow Bermuda grass at 1.5 inches or less. Zoysia grass does best when mowed at 2 inches. Buffalo grass is more of a groundcover than a lawn grass. It does not respond well to being manicured. Mow it at 5 inches or taller.

Winter weeds are trying to set seed now. To prevent production of seed for next winter’s weeds, keep them pulled out or mowed down. It is late for contact herbicides because the weeds like thistle, dandelions, bedstraw, henbit, rye grass, rescue grass and beggar lice will decline anyway with the heat.

A pre-emergent herbicide such as Crabgrass Preventer, Amaze or XL should have been applied about March 1 to prevent the early germinating hot weather weeds such as sand burs and crabgrass but if applied now, the herbicide will prevent a significant portion of the pesky weeds.

**Garden Tasks**

It is time to plant your tomatoes in the vegetable garden. Use determinate varieties such as Tigress, Tycoon, 444, Phoenix, Celebrity, 602 or BHN 968 (cherry) so they set fruit before it gets too hot.

The weather should be mild enough and all danger of frost is past so put the bouganvillea, hibiscus and other cold sensitive plants back onto the patio.

Spraying your roses with acephate and triforine every week will control most insects and diseases. Organic gardens can try sulfur products, Spinosad and neem oil.

The paper whites, cemetery iris and other naturalized bulbs have completed their bloom period but let the foliage brown naturally before you cut it down.