**Q&A**

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

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Q: Is it time to fertilize the lawn yet?

A: 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.

Q: What happens if we just leave our live oak leaves to decompose on the lawn?

A: If you have live oak tree, the leaves are probably covering your lawn right now. You have several choices in dealing with the leaves. If they are not too deep, you can just let them lay and they will decompose over the next few weeks. Speed the decomposition process along by mowing the leaves where they lay. The small pieces decompose faster than whole leaves.

Q: Which tomato is best to grow in a container? Patio tomatoes are pretty but the fruit does not seem very tasty.

A: My favorite tomato for a container is BHN 968, the Rodeo cherry tomato. It is relatively short (5 feet) and compact. BHN 968 is also seems to be efficient with water. Actually Tycoon is also a good choice for a container.

Q: Is it time to plant the hot weather annuals yet? What works in the shade?

A: Yes, you can plant zinnias, moss rose, purslane and other warm weather annuals now. Consider begonias, caladium and coleus for the shade. Coleus is on the deer proof list.

Q: Should we quit feeding the birds now?

A: I assume you are asking about sunflower and other seeds. We are just beginning the hummingbird feeding period. Put 1 part sugar in 4 parts water in a sugar water feeder.

I continue feeding the birds seed until about May 1, and even then I feed thistle seed all summer because I enjoy the lesser gold finches. I quit feeding other seed in the summer because grackles become dominant and the break seems to discourage rodents from becoming dependent on birdseed.

There are strategies to discourage rats at bird feeders. Visit my archives articles on plantanswers.com.

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