**Lawn Care in February Qs and As**

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Q: Why do you recommend we use compost for lawn top dressing rather than commercial top dressing?

A: Top dressing usually includes sand with the compost. Compost is the active ingredient and sand is the “filler”. They usually cost about the same so you should have 100 percent active ingredient.

Q: We want our lawn to green up fast this spring. When can we fertilize?

A: Lawn green-up is mostly determined by the weather with the help of nutrients that were collected and stored last fall. The fall fertilization has more influence on spring green-up than the spring fertilizer.

As much as you want to rush your lawn green up this spring, it does not do any good to fertilize the lawn early. Our hot weather grasses can only take up the nitrogen from fertilizer after they have an active top growth. Wait to fertilize your lawn until you have mowed real grass 2 times.

Q: Which is the fastest growing oak species?

A: In our area it seems to be a close competition between Texas red oak and Mexican white oak. Texas red oak often has good fall color but it is decidious and has some susceptibility to oak wilt. Mexican white oak is evergreen and resistant to oak wilt. Both species produce a high quality, long-lived, drought-tolerant shade tree.

Q: We want to grow our own tomato seedlings this year. When should we start them?

A: Tomatoes are started about 6 weeks before we plant them in the garden. February 15 is a good date for an April 1 planting.

Q: We have several different species of birds at our thistle feeder. How do we tell the difference between lesser goldfinches and American goldfinches?

A: The male lesser goldfinches do not lose their gold and black colors. If you see a gold and black bird, it is a male lesser goldfinch. The females are just as small and slim. If they are plumper, larger, dull-colored goldfinch-like birds left, they are American goldfinches. Size and color are the way to tell them apart.

Q: My roses still have leaves. Should I worry?

A: No, they may fall en masse later this month if there is another cold spell. Sometimes the old leaves are just pushed off by the new leaves if the winter is mild. Plan to prune the hybrid tea roses sometime after Valentine’s Day.