**Hortibull March Gardening Calendar**

**Calvin Finch, PhD**

**Director, Water Conservation and Technology Center**

It is always tough to decide when to put tomato plants in the garden. If you put them in place before the soil warms up even if there are no freezing temperatures, the plants will harden off and you will have reduced production and late fruit.

April 1 is a safe date most years. One of the best strategies is to pot up small tomato plants in February and then gradually put them in the garden. Some in mid March, most about April 1, and save some for April 15.

The Rodeo Tomato for 2013- Tygress is supposed to be of the same mold as the favorite 2011 tomato- Tycoon. Tycoon and the 2012 version “602” will be available at area nurseries. Another superior tomato BHN 568, also called Rodeo Cherry Surprise, should be available in sufficient supply to meet demand for the first time in several years. Other varieties to select from will be Celebrity, Solar Fire and 444. There should also be a few Merced and Surefire plants on the market.

Early in the month is a good time to apply a pre-emergent herbicide to prevent sand burs. Good products to use are Amaze, XL and Crabgrass Preventer.

Wait to fertilize your lawn until you have mowed real grass, not weeds, twice. It is often not until after April 15. Use a slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-15-9.

Your snapdragons, larkspur, stocks, pansies, coreopsis, verbenas and primrose ought to be blooming in March. Apply a small dose of slow release lawn fertilizer for the flush of bloom for the flowers in the garden.

Prune your hybrid tea roses early in the month. Open up the middles and reduce height to 3 feet or less. Leave 3-4 stems emerging from the base at about 60 degrees. For disease and insect free blooms, begin a weekly spray program. Triforine (Funginex) and acephate are the traditional pesticides. Organic gardeners can try Rose Defense (neem oil), sulfur and spinosad.

Modern tough roses such as Knockout, Belinda’s Dream, Grandma’s Yellow and Katy Road and old-fashioned roses benefit by some pruning and a spray program but it is not necessary.