**Shade Plants for Color and Low Growing Summer Annuals**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

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

For summer color with shade, consider begonias, caladium and coleus.

The semperfloren begonia varieties offer small flowers in pink, red and white. Many selections have red-green foliage.

If begonias are planted early in the season (by early May), they can survive our summer in the sun, but certainly prefer the shade.

Caladiums are bulbs. If you plant the bulbs themselves, wait until May so there is no chance of soggy soil. The easiest way to use caladiums is to buy plants with foliage already growing. Caladiums are grown for their white and reddish foliage. Many selections also are decorated with tracings of dark green or white on the foliage.

Coleus is another summer annual grown for foliage color. The foliage varies from deep maroon to very yellow-green with lots of variations in between.

Coleus is on some deer-proof lists. Protect the planting with weekly sprays of Liquid Fence for three weeks to discourage the deer from pulling up the new plants out of curiosity.

The best low-growing heat-lovers for the sun in a San Antonio summer are moss rose and purslane. Both species creep along the ground where they produce red, yellow, white, pink, red, orange and even bicolor blooms. The newest varieties claim that they bloom for more hours in the day. The main complaint against moss roses and purslane is that they only bloom until late afternoon each day.

Moss rose and purslane are an attractive choice for hanging baskets and containers. The foliage has the look of a succulent (without any thorns) and the plants are, in fact, drought tolerant. Butterflies are attracted to moss rose and purslane.

**Garden Tasks**

Soaker or leaky hoses can be just as efficient as drip irrigation for flower beds and new plantings but review the drought management rules. They are not treated as generously as drip irrigation.

It is a good time to plant okra and southern peas by seed in the vegetable garden. Plant peppers as transplants.

Reduce the likelihood that spider mites will overcome your tomatoes before they mature a crop by spraying seaweed extract (2 tablespoons in 1 gallon of water) to the underside of the leaves each week.

Harvest your roses and zinnias as cut flowers or “deadhead” them (remove spent flowers) to encourage new blooms.