**Q&A**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Director and Horticulturist**

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

Q: There has been a lot in the news about Monarch butterflies and the declining populations. Do you know anything about it? Is there anything we as gardeners can do?  
A: The same reports that provided the reduced counts on the wintering grounds give us hope that populations can increase if rains increase this year. This can contribute to more flowers for nectar along the migration routes north. They also mention that area gardeners along the way can contribute to the restoration of numbers with more blooms in their landscapes.

We can go even further by encouraging Monarchs to breed by providing Asclepias (also called milkweed or butterfly weed). This genus of plant is the only source of food for growing Monarch caterpillars and the only place where they will lay their eggs.

There are a number of native milkweeds and several exotic versions with showier orange flowers available at area nurseries. Plant three or four of them in full or partial sun and you can contribute to the speedy restoration of the Monarch population, at least that part that is due to the drought across its range.

Q: Do you need to peel carrots before they are cooked or eaten fresh?

A: It depends on how tough the skin is and what your own tastes are. I rarely peel carrots from my own garden that are fresh.

Q: Is a live oak the best choice is our area for a shade tree?

A: A live oak is generally the highest rated shade tree in terms of property value but it’s not always the best choice because it is a relatively slow grower and has some susceptibility to oak wilt. I often recommend that Texas red oak, Mexican white oak, cedar elm, bur oak or chinkapin oak be planted instead, depending on the individual situation.

Q: What are some summer flowers that are easy to grow by seed?

A: The ones that come to mind are zinnias, cosmos, marigolds, moss roses and purslane.

Q: Is it time yet to fertilize the lawn?

A: Yes, the hot weather grasses are at the point in top growth and root development that they can use the nutrients.

Q: We planted Bermuda grass seed in February and it did not germinate. You diagnosed the problem as cool air temperature and soil temperature. Do you believe it is warm enough?

A: Yes, May 1 is a reliable date for predicting that conditions are right for Bermuda grass to germinate. Water every morning and evening for one week by which time it should have germinated.

[Calvin.finch@tamu.edu](mailto:Calvin.finch@tamu.edu)