**Q&A**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

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

Q: I am trying to get my compost pile to work faster. It is loaded with oak leaves. What is the trick?

A: The trick is to have about 60 percent green material such as grass clippings, weeds and kitchen scraps mixed with the leaves. It also helps to moisten the pile every week. In the absence of enough green material, add four or five cups of lawn fertilizer spread over the top of the pile and watered in. You will know the compost is working if the pile is warm to the touch and reaches 140 to 160 degrees in the center.

Q: Our New Gold lantana has quit blooming. The leaves also look dusty and grayish. Is it a disease? What can we do?

A: The problem is caused by lace bugs, a sucking insect that is attracted to New Gold lantana. The damage is done. The plants will recover and start blooming in 6 to 8 weeks. To prevent them next year, make a note on your calendar to apply acephate or Bayer Systemic Insecticide every two weeks beginning June 1.

Q: We planted our tomatoes on August 1 as recommended but they look sad and aren’t growing. Should we fertilize them more?

A: The problem is the 100˚ F heat. Keep them well watered but not soggy. Do not add any extra fertilizer. The plants are growing a root system and will be ready to put on foliage when the weather breaks. Last year is an example of the similar issue. It ended up being a great year for production once the temperatures cooled.

Q: Last year our lawn was overwhelmed with bedstraw weed and annual rye. This year we want to prevent the problem. Is it time to apply a pre-emergent herbicide? Which do you recommend?

A: Yes, now is a good time to apply pre-emergent herbicide to prevent winter weeds. For the grassy weeds the products Amaze and XL work well. For broadleaf weeds such as bedstraw, thistle, beggar lice and dandelions use a product such as Portrait. Check the labels for a list of which weeds the products control and how to use them safely and effectively.

For questions about horticulture, water conservation and the environment, email Calvin Finch at Calvin.finch@tamu.edu