**Q&A**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

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

Q: Why do you recommend Round-up all the time? I have heard that it is dangerous for pets and the environment.

A: I try to use the least toxic, yet effective, pesticide to control specific weeds, insects and diseases in the garden. In many cases that turns out to be an organic control such as Bt or spinosad. For killing weeds however, glyphosate (the active ingredient in Round-up) is hard to beat.

Applied to actively growing weeds it moves from the green foliage to the roots and usually kills the whole weed plant. It is especially effective for controlling Bermuda grass.

Glyphosate is also very safe according to documented research results. Once it dries after application, it does not affect other plants and it is deactivated when it contacts the soil.

Do not rely on hearsay concerning any perceived threat to pets. If you follow the label instructions, it is very safe. For an interesting testimony from a locally renowned organic gardening expert, visit plantanswers.com and read the write-up on glyphosate by Malcolm Beck, the original owner of Garden Ville.

Q: When can I plant tomatoes? What are the recommended varieties?

A: Plant tomatoes now for the autumn. Look for heat setters such as Surefire, Solar Fire, Heatwave, BHN 968, Tycoon, Tygress and 444. Reliable old timers such as Celebrity and Merced are also good.

Q: Can we fertilize our lawn for the fall now?

A: It is best to wait until October 1. Use a “winterizer” formula such as 15-5-10.

Q: How long will my zinnias keep producing? They have been great this summer.

A: Zinnias will often keep producing blooms until Thanksgiving when cold weather arrives. Early plantings, however, often become infected with powdery mildew about now. Pull the infected plants and replant or wait until September and plant the winter annuals such as snapdragons, stocks, dianthus and calendula. You may also want to try a short crop of marigolds. They make a good show in the fall when spider mite pressure is reduced. Look for the large flowered selections such as Discovery.

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