**Q&A**

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Q: Something is pecking our citrus. The result is unappetizing black marks all over the fruit. My husband thinks it might be a fungus, but I think it is birds. Who is correct? What can we do?

A: You are correct; the black pecks are from grackles. The young birds seem to obtain some food value from pecking the unripe peelings. The fruit is scarred but can usually still be used. So far, no good solution has been discovered to discourage the damage. Sorry!

Q: Can we still apply Bermuda sod in October? We are moving into a new house and need to cover the bare soil.

A: You have several options. I think I would go ahead and apply the sod. There is some risk that an early cold spell would injure the newly laid sod if it occurred before the sod was rooted, but chances are good that it will do fine.

Another option is to plant rye or rescue seed for the winter. It will look good this winter and help prevent erosion or mud, and will decline in May just at the best time to apply Bermuda sod or seed.

Q: You are talking about Surefire tomatoes on your radio show in San Antonio. Isn’t it too late to plant tomatoes and expect a crop?

A: It is certainly late. Surefire is the fastest maturing variety. If the weather cooperates they actually may produce tomatoes for Christmas. Sometimes if a gardener can protect the tomatoes from the first freeze, there will be two or three more weeks of mild weather. If the fruit reaches full size, they can be picked green and will ripen in the house.

Q: What eats acorns besides the squirrels? It seems that bushels and bushels fall from our red oaks and live oaks but they disappear within days.

A: In my neighborhood, deer and rodents eat acorns in addition to the squirrels. Birds such as blue jays, woodpeckers and doves will also eat acorns, especially those nuts cut open by squirrels or run over by an automobile.

Q: Our Texas gold Columbines all have died back. Will they reappear?

A: Some will but they need to be irrigated as quickly as possible. If the top is completely gone, the plant will probably not recover. If there is some remnant of green, the water will keep them alive and they will recover when cool weather returns.

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