**Calvin Finch PhD**

**Horticulturist and Director**

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

**“Q&A”**

Q: Can we plant cemetery iris in the shade? They seem to grow anywhere.

A: Cemetery iris will survive in the shade, but they bloom best in full sun. Plant them 18 inches apart and only deep enough so the top of the rhizome is even with the soil surface.

Q: Our live oak leaves have fallen from the tree and the tree is loaded with ball moss. Is that why the leaves have dropped? Will the ball moss kill the tree?

A: Your tree is dropping its leaves a little early, but all live oaks drop their leaves for a short time in February or March. Mow the leaves, and let them decompose on the lawn. Use them for mulch or as fuel for the compost pile.

Ball moss grows on live oak branches or even utility lines. It likes shaded branches that are declining as a growing site, but the branches are dying because of the shade not the ball moss. Ball moss is not a parasite, and it can be controlled with a Kocide spray at this time of the year if you find it unattractive.

Q: When can we fertilize the grass?

A: Wait until May 1 to apply a slow-release lawn fertilizer. This month, aerate and top dress the lawn with compost. The treatment really restores the grass.

Q: We have harvested the main heads of our broccoli and cauliflower, and it was great. Should we pull the plants now?

A: Pull the cauliflower plants and put them in the compost pile. Fertilize the broccoli with a cup of lawn fertilizer along each 8 feet of row. The broccoli will produce side shoots that will be smaller than the central head, but they still taste great.

Q: The local nursery already has tomato plants. Is it too early to plant them in the garden?

A: Yes, it is too early to plant them in the garden, but you can “pot them up”. Put the transplant in a one to three gallon plastic container filled with potting soil and Osmocote. Place the container in the sun out of the wind. The key is to maintain active growth. If a night with a temperature below 40 degrees is forecast, move the plants indoors. Plant them in the garden about April 1.

Q: What is the best geranium for our area?

A: Look for Fantasia Strawberry Sizzle on Fantasia Violet. These two selections have the most heat tolerance in statewide tests. The flowers are also great.

For questions about horticulture, water conservation and the environment, email Calvin Finch at [Calvin.finch@tamu.edu](mailto:Calvin.finch@tamu.edu)