**Web**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Urban Water Program Director**

**Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources**

**“Tomato Q&A”**

Q. What spider mite preventative spray do you recommend for tomatoes?

A. Some gardeners spray under the leaves each week with neem oil or seaweed extract. Some even spray both! If mites show up anyway, increase the spray frequency to twice per week. Spray in the early morning or the evening. Avoid spraying during the sunniest, hottest part of the day.

Q. Is it worth it to cover tomato cages with agricultural fabric? It is a hassle to put it on the cages.

A. Do you use sea snap clothespins to secure the fabric? They are relatively easy to use. Dr Jerry Parsons, my colleague on the Gardening South Texas Radio Show, thinks the fabric tactic is the best way to insure a good crop. He says the fabric provides protection from the wind, disease-carrying sucking insects, chewing insects like grasshoppers and the cold. I used the fabric one year to exclude virus-carrying thrips. It is a matter of each gardener deciding if the work of wrapping the cages is worth the protection provided.

Q. Can we finally fertilize our lawns now? Our lawn seems to have greened up and is growing strongly.

A. The recommendation is to fertilize the lawn after you have mowed real grass — not weeds — twice. That point is usually reached by May 1. Fertilize with a slow-release lawn fertilizer, such as 19-5-9, at that time.

Q. Last year we had caterpillars that hung from strings from our live oak leaves. They ate the new growth. We didn’t do anything to control them. The trees seem fine, but should we have done something to control them? What about this year?

A. You did fine. There are at least three different caterpillars that feed on young live oak leaves in the spring. The trees seem to take the feeding in stride. The only exception would be for a small or newly planted tree. They could be sprayed with an organic Bt product or Sevin to protect the leaves.

Q. We like coleus for summer color. We use it in the shade but were told that the plant could be used in the sun. Is it true?

A. Yes, the selections that do well in the sun are called “sun coleus.” They are available in many nurseries in several colors including dark maroon and lime green. Check in your favorite nursery and then call around.

Q. Should okra be planted by seed or transplant?

A. Plant okra April 15 through May. It does perfectly well when planted by seed, but transplants also work.

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