**Lettuce Q&A**

Q. We are going to try and grow lettuce again this year. What is the trick? It never germinates.

A. The main problem gardeners have with lettuce is that the seed must not be covered with soil if it is going to germinate. Prepare the soil by tilling some compost and slow-release lawn fertilizer, rake it smooth and then apply the seed. Irrigate with a gentle spray from a water wand every day until the seedlings appear and show regular leaves. Drip irrigation can be used after that point.

Q. Our live oaks are dropping acorns. By morning the acorns disappear. What eats acorns in the night?

A. Lots of animals eat acorns. In the day deer, squirrels, blue jays, white-wing doves and golden-fronted woodpeckers will pick them up. At night, rats and raccoons may eat them. Smaller birds will eat the meats of acorns mashed on the road or sidewalk.

Q. Tell us about growing tomatoes this fall.

A. The best tomato varieties for reliable production seem to be Sunfire, Solar Fire, Tycoon, BHN 602, 444, Celebrity, BHN 956 (Rodeo Cherry) and Phoenix. Sunfire produces tennis ball-sized fruit and is the quickest variety to produce mature fruit. It will only be available in limited quantities because it is no longer produced for commercial crops. Latch on to a few plants if you see them at your favorite nursery.

To prepare your raised beds for a productive fall gardening experience, apply 2 inches of compost over the surface, add 1 cup of slow-release lawn fertilizer per 50 square feet of bed and till or turnover the soil with a shovel.

Tomato cages are important to keep the plant upright and the fruit off the ground. Tomatoes are heavy feeders and use a lot of water. You may have to water them every day in high temperatures. Apply one-quarter cup of slow-release lawn fertilizer

Q. We went on vacation and now we have brown patches in our lawn. We water every week but the brown areas are in the hottest part of the lawn on a slope. Could it just be heat? It is zoysia grass that has been in for 2 years. Is the grass dead?

A. It sounds like the grass has just gone dormant from drying and the heat. Zoysia, Bermuda and Buffalo grass have the ability to go dormant. It will green up when the rain starts again or you can give the area some special hand watering to green it up now. Make sure the water is penetrating into the soil on the slope.