**Q&A**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

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

Q: We have put firebush on our patio and have several sugar water feeders. We expect to see ruby-throated, rufous and black-chinned hummingbirds this fall as usual. We were surprised, however, by seeing what we think are buff-breasted hummingbirds. Is that possible?

A: Yes, last year there were several buff-breasted hummingbirds identified in this period of hummingbird movement.

Q: Why isn’t there more use of winter rye with buffalo grass lawns? It seems like a perfect combination?

A: Unfortunately buffalo grass does not seem to survive if there is a winter cover of rye or fescue planted. The moisture at soil level and high humidity within the winter cover results in dieback of the buffalo grass.

Q: Are the hybrid live oaks advertised at some nurseries superior to regular live oak?

A: All live oaks are hybrids. The advertised live oak hybrids have been selected from parentage that grows more upright and at a faster rate than other live oaks. If you want those characteristics, the advertised “hybrid” can be described as superior.

Q: What is the difference between turnips and rutabagas?

A: There is not much of a difference. It is the same genus and species. Rutabagas take longer to mature and end up generally larger. Turnip foliage is often eaten. We assume it has a milder flavor.

Q: When can we plant cyclamen and pansies? It seems to me, you had us wait until November last year?

A: November is a good time to plant them because both are sensitive to hot spells. If they are planted earlier and we have a heat wave, expect them to decline instead of providing color through the winter.

Q: Does seaweed extract really work to prevent spider mites?

A: Research results indicate when it is sprayed under the leaves every week, it can slow down spider mite reproduction. Some gardeners credit it with great powers. I have had problems with leaf burn. Use a dilute spray of two tablespoons or less per gallon of water and spray in the morning or evening after the sun is down.

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