**Winter Annuals Q’s & A’s**

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Q: When can we plant our winter annuals?

A: Plant snapdragons, ornamental kale, dianthus, stock, petunias and calendula now. Wait until November to plant pansies, primula and cyclamen. Cyclamen and primula require shade to prosper. All the rest do best in full sun.

Q: We are confused about leaf drop here in Texas. We have red oaks, Mexican white oak and live oaks.

A: The red oaks will drop their leaves in November or December depending on the weather. Live oaks drop their leaves for a short time in late February or March. The Mexican white oak may not drop its leaves in a normal year. In very cold or very dry periods, Mexican white oak may drop its leaves without a problem to the tree.

Q: Our tomatoes look spectacular. Last year the freeze wiped them out. How should I prepare to protect them this year?

A: Anytime the weather forecast predicts that temperatures will fall to 36oF or below, be ready to cover the plants with agricultural fiber, sheets or blankets. Retail nurseries sell special materials for the job, or you can use whatever material that is available.

If temperatures are going to fall below 30oF, you can cover with a cloth material and plastic. At 28oF, a heat source will be needed to protect the plants. I like a string of Christmas lights or a mechanic’s light.

Some gardeners have special structures on which to hang the cloth and plastic, but most of us just use our tomato cages.

The key to protecting tomatoes through mid-December is to have everything in place and to keep your eye on the forecast.

Q: Is it too late to fertilize our St. Augustine lawn for the winter?

A: No, as long as the grass is green it can take up and store the nutrients.

Q: What greens do you recommend for the winter garden?

A: Plant Swiss chard, beets, mustard, collards, kale and turnips now. Plant spinach transplants in November. I like beets, Swiss chard, spinach and collards the best. Swiss chard last over the longest season. It is also an attractive plant, especially if you plant the “Bright Lights” selection. It has yellow, orange, green and red stems.