**April Gardening Calendar**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

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

April is when many area lawns begin the serious growth period. The lawn can be fertilized with slow-release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 after real grass has been mowed two times. For some lawns, that may not be until May 1.

If you fertilize too early, weeds benefit more than lawn grass and some of the nitrogen is lost.

As a general rule, mow St. Augustine grass at 3 inches or higher, zoysia grass at 2 inches and Bermuda grass at 1.5 inches or lower. If you mow Buffalo grass at less than 5 inches tall, the weeds fill in the open space between grass plants. The choice is often mow high or use pre-emergent weed herbicide every spring and fall.

Crabgrass and sand burs may have begun to germinate already but you will prevent a portion of the plants that would germinate in May, June and July if a herbicide such as Crabgrass Preventer, Amaze or XL is applied early in the month.

Maintain your spray programs on fruit trees and roses. If stink bugs show up on peaches or blackberries, Sevin and Malathion are two of the few insecticides that can control them. Follow label instructions to accomplish safe, efficient control. The label instructions are also the law for use of the specific pesticide!

April is tomato month. Seek out one or more of the recommended varieties. Look for Tycoon, Tygress, BHN 968, 602, Phoenix, Celebrity, 444 or Solar Fire.

Prepare the soil by incorporating 2 inches of compost and slow-release lawn fertilizer over the planting area. One cup of the fertilizer for each 50 square feet works well.

Use a steel reinforcing wire or aluminum wire tomato cage to keep the fruit off the ground.

Tomatoes are not xeriscape plants. They need water every two to three days. Drip irrigation works best.

Help prevent spider mites by spraying with neem oil and seaweed extract every week. Increase to twice weekly sprays if the pests appear. Spray under the foliage.

Snapdragons may bloom well for another month, but April is also a good time to plant zinnias. For instant blooms, seek out the Dreamland transplants at area nurseries. Zinnias are at their best if you use them for cut flowers or deadhead (remove) blooms that have declined.

Lettuce and most other greens will turn bitter as the month progresses. Use them as long as they taste good. It is also a good time to use up your carrots, beets, turnips and rutabagas.

Potatoes can be harvested when the plants begin to bloom but can also stay in the ground until the plants brown.

Make sure the onions are thinned to 6 inches between the plants. Apply one last fertilization this month. Onions should be ready to harvest in late May.

To keep the squash vine borers at bay, apply a dose of Sevin or Spinosad at the growing point every week.

If you have bird baths and especially moving water, watch for migrating painted buntings, warblers and orioles. They can be spectacular. The ruby throat and black chinned hummingbirds should be visiting your hummingbird feeders. The ruby throated will breed east of Interstate 35 and the black chinned will breed in the west of the area.

To insure reseeding for next spring, let the bluebonnets and other wildflowers set their seed and brown before they are cut down.