**August Gardening Calendar**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

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

It is hard to believe since August is so hot to begin with that it actually starts cooling as the month progresses. The cooler nighttime temperatures are easier to detect than the daytime temperatures most years.

In the vegetable garden it is time to plant tomatoes for the fall. Select a heat setter for at least one of your choices. Tycoon, Tygress, Solar fire and Phoenix are good choices.

Surefire is one of the best fall tomatoes because it is a heat-setter and the fastest variety to mature a crop. Plant it early in August and Surefire will always beat the first freeze with vine ripened tennis ball size fruit. Maybe I shouldn’t have promoted it so glowingly because Surefire is not the easiest tomato variety to find!

For a cherry tomato BHN 968 (again, if you can find it) is the best bet. It is a semi-determinate like the other heat setters so it spends minimal time growing foliage and concentrates on setting fruit.

Keep your August-planted tomatoes well watered and mulch the soil with leaves or compost to help keep the soil cool.

Zinnias, vincas, cosmos, moss roses and purslane should continue to make a good show in the full sun annual bed. If your early planted zinnias are beginning to look bad because of mildew, don’t hesitate to plant a new batch of transplants. They will bloom through November when the cold weather arrives.

In the shade, begonias, caladiums and coleus should continue to perform as long as you keep them watered.

“New Gold” lantana is susceptible to lace bugs attack. Recognize it when the plants quit blooming and the leaves look dusty. Lace bugs suck the juices from the leaves just like spider mites.

Treat lace bugs with acephate or other systemic insecticides. The lantanas should recover in time for an October re-bloom. Mark your calendar for next year to spray them in June and July to prevent the damage.

Another insect-caused problem often shows up in the lawn in early August. All summer grubs have been eating the roots of your lawn grass and now the grass plants can’t pull up enough water to keep it green in the heat. In addition to dead areas in the lawn, you can often pull up these dead areas like they were toupees. It is no use to apply an insecticide now; the grubs have emerged as June bugs or are full size and not feeding any longer. Again, mark your calendars for a May or June application of a soil insecticide to prevent the problem next year.

To keep the esperanza and poincianas blooming, remove spent flowers and seed heads as they appear. You can deadhead durantas as well, but the yellow berries are so attractive you may want to let them mature.

Other perennials that look good in August are the blue salvias. There are some large ones such as Indigo Spires and some more orderly growers such as Victoria with everything in between. They are a favorite hummingbird and butterfly nectar source.

Two spectacular bloomers for late fall, fall aster and mint marigold, show up in nurseries in August. They won’t reach full size the first year but in following years for three weeks in November they steal the show as they produce a mound that is 2 feet tall and 6 feet in diameter that is covered with blooms. Fall asters are lavender blue and mint marigold is golden. Plant both in full sun. Mint marigold is not eaten by the deer.