**Q&A**

**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

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

Q: What are some good gardening books to consider as a gift for a gardener?

A: There are many good ones. Here are a few of my favorites: consider “Perennial Garden Color” by Bill Welch and “Home Landscaping Texas” by Greg Grant and Roger Holmes. Geyata Ajilvsgi has a good book, “Butterfly Gardening for the South.” Mike Shoup’s newest book is “Empress of the Garden.” It is about old-fashioned roses. “Attracting Birds to Southern Gardens” by Pope Odenwald and Fryling is another good choice. Another is “Texas Fruit and Vegetable Gardening” by Greg Grant.

Q: What is the best lawn fertilizer for use on our lawns this fall? How about next spring?

A: The most common “winterizer” fertilizer is 18-6-12. It does the job well in the autumn. In the spring (May 1), use a slow-release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9. The key to a fertilizers’ impact (and price) is the amount of nitrogen represented by the first number listed. The 18 means 18 percent of the bag is a nitrogen source. The second number is the amount of phosphorus and the third number is a potassium source.

Q: I have three types of spinach in my garden: “Monster,” Ashley and Coho. Which do you think will produce best?

A: I think the Monster will produce more spinach through the winter but may not last as long as Ashley or Coho, both of which have more disease resistance. Coho seed and plants are difficult to find. You are well positioned to run your own experiment. Please let me know which works best for you.

Q: I have not had any luck with sweet peas over the last two years. What is the secret?

A: Our climate is not the best to grow sweet peas. It is either too cold or too hot. Keep planting them. If you have a crop that survives our weather, it will all be worth it! They are great cut flowers with a wonderful fragrance.

Q: Is it still a good time to plant shade trees?

A: Yes, pick a well-adapted variety such as live oak, Texas red oak, Mexican white oak, cedar elm, Mexican sycamore, bur oak or chinkapin oak and plant it this winter.

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