

Urban Horticulturer

June 2001



TURFGRASS

It appears that we are finally going to receive some rain for our very dry landscape. Hopefully the rain will regreen our lawns. However, we are probably going to find some spots that have died. If the rain continues, you may want to fill in some of these dead spots in your St. Augustine lawn with plugs or sod pieces. Before sprigging or sodding, check your lawn pH as it may need to be adjusted with an application of dolomite. The optimum pH level for St. Augustine lawns is 6.5.

Be on the lookout for chinch bugs in your St. Augustine turf. They may show up first in dryer hotter areas of your lawn such as along sidewalks and driveways. If you see an area turning slightly yellow, carefully get down on your knees and slowly spread the grass blades apart and look for tiny black insects (1/8 inch) with silvery wings lying flat on their back or smaller red insects (immatures) with a white band on their back. Look in several spots and remember that these tiny insects will disappear quickly after they are disturbed. If

you see these insects, than you will need to spray the infested area with a recommended insecticide.

There is not any need to spray your entire lawn, just the infested area plus an additional 10 feet. Keep in mind that these yellow spots can also be caused by drought or fungus diseases.

Typical summer turf diseases are Take all root rot, Gray leaf spot, Pythium root rot and Fairy ring. The most serious of these diseases is Take all root rot in St. Augustine which shows up as a circular spot that progressively enlarges. About the only way to identify this disease is to take a turf sample and send it to the University of Florida Plant Disease Testing Laboratory. There isn't any chemical control for this disease. Cultural control measures involve keeping the turf free of stress, mow correctly, apply foliar fertilizers, or just replace sod.

If you have a damaged bahiagrass lawn, you could try putting out seed in the dead areas. Make sure the seed has been scarified. Scarified seed are those which have had the outer seed coat partially removed which allows moisture to more easily enter the seed and

enhance germination. Getting bahiagrass seed to germinate and establish in your lawn is not an easy task. Till the soil before seeding and try to incorporate the seed 1/4 inch into the soil. Incorporating the seed can be accomplished by dragging a piece of fencing over the seeded area. The seed and surrounding soil must be kept moist until the seed have become established.



This is the time of the year that mole cricket eggs are hatching. Mole crickets are a serious problem in bahiagrass lawns. If mole cricket damage occurred the previous year or if excessive tunneling (egg laying) was noticed this spring, then a recommended insecticide should be applied during mid to late June.

If you are replacing your lawn, you may want to consider a grass called seashore paspalum. Seashore paspalum (*Paspalum vaginatum*) is closely related to bahiagrass (*Paspalum notatum*) and is probably superior to bahiagrass in a number of ways. It can be irrigated with recycled water, it has good drought tolerance under proper management, it has a minimal seed head production, it is not as susceptible to mole crickets as bahiagrass, it has a fine leaf texture similar to bermudagrass which is superior to the open growth habit of bahiagrass, it will tolerate pH's from 4.0 to 9.0 and has good disease resistance. It must be propagated vegetatively with sprigs or sod. You can find more in-depth information on seashore paspalum as well as other turfgrass information at the University of Florida Turf Web Site-<http://turf.ifas.ufl.edu>. Click on residential landscape.

In areas where you regularly have problems maintaining turfgrass, such as under oak trees, choose ground covers such as asiatic jasmine, mondo grass, Algerian ivy and English ivy. A mulched bed of *Spathyphilum* plants also

works quite well under oak trees. The Extension Service has literature on plants that can be grown in shaded areas. Mulched beds can also be created in sunny areas. There are many drought tolerant native and non-native plants available for these areas. Many palms and cycads are drought tolerant as well as cold tolerant such as coonties sagos, cabbage palms, date palms, and pindo palms. Queen palms are drought tolerant, but are somewhat sensitive to cold temperature, although most survived the cold of December 2000.

CRAPE MYRTLE

Crape myrtle is one of our most versatile landscape plants. For best growth it should be planted in full sun. Plants of various sizes, shapes, flower colors, fall foliage colors, and bark color have been developed through extensive breeding programs. They are now available as medium trees, small trees, shrubs, ground covers, container plants, and hanging baskets with a variety of interesting bark colors. In addition to having better overall qualities, it was found that the new crape myrtle hybrids were resistant to powdery mildew, but still susceptible to aphid infestations.

Tree cultivars (over 20 feet in 10 years) that are now available include Natchez (white flowers and cinnamon bark), Biloxi (pink flowers and red bark), Choctaw (pink flowers), and Fantasy (white flowers and red-orange bark). Intermediate size cultivars (12-20 feet) include Sioux (pink flowers and red fall color from leaves), Osage (medium pink flowers) has large panicles, glossy green leaves, and orange bark, and Apalachee (lavender flowers and orange-brown bark). Semi-dwarf cultivars (5-12 feet) include Tonto (red flowers), Pecos (medium pink flowers), Caddo (pink flowers), and Acomo (white flowers). Acomo has white flowers, a horizontal growth pattern, gray-green leaves and creamy colored bark - a beautiful cultivar. Dwarfs (under 5 feet),

which are non-hybrids and susceptible to powdery mildew, include New Orleans (can be used in baskets and containers), Delta Blush (pink flowers), Petite Red Imp, Sacramento, and Orlando (pink flowers).

New breeding developments include dwarf hybrids, Pocomoke and Chickasaw, which are resistant to powdery mildew. These are slow growing, have glossy green leaves, and pink flowers. Dynamite is a new non-hybrid cultivar that has a true red flower and grows to about 15 feet, but unfortunately is susceptible to powdery mildew. Another new cultivar is Pink Voleur which has burgundy bark and pink flowers.

For best results and minimum maintenance choose a cultivar which is suited to your landscape use. Misplacement of a tree or shrub-like cultivar will require constant pruning to keep it from outgrowing its place. Full sun is necessary for best flowering and for development of a full symmetrical crown. Crape myrtles tolerate a wide range of soil types, but grow poorly in wet soils. It tolerates a wide range of soil pH (5.0-6.5).

Crape myrtles transplant easily. The best time to plant is in early summer when the plant is actively growing. Newly planted crape myrtles should be watered regularly for the first few weeks to aid in establishment. Once established crape myrtles are extremely drought tolerant. Established crape myrtles usually do not need to be fertilized, because root systems usually extend into lawns where they can absorb nutrients from lawn fertilizers. Young crape myrtles can benefit from 3 applications per year of a complete fertilizer. Plants should be mulched to a depth of 3 inches.

If the right variety is used, then crape myrtles should need little pruning. If pruning becomes necessary to improve plant shape or form, prune anytime after the leaves have

fallen. If they are pruned too early in the fall, then new growth may emerge and be killed by the first freeze. Crape myrtles should not be pruned hard on an annual or regular basis. Severe pruning can induce excess vegetative growth, basal sprouting and fewer, but larger flowers. Excessive fall pruning also destroys the beautiful winter branch structure on crape myrtle trees.

Aphids can become a problem from time to time and will need to be controlled with insecticidal soap or a recommended insecticide. The honeydew produced by uncontrolled aphid populations supports unsightly growths of sooty mold.

CITRUS



Check citrus trees for rampant growth of suckers that deprive other branches of supporting fruit. If suckers are growing from the rootstock (below the graft of scion and rootstock), cut them back to the trunk. Suckers growing from the trunk or along the branches (above the graft) should be cut back to the trunk or branch.

Now is the time to make a fertilizer application. Use a complete fertilizer with micronutrients and magnesium such as 6-6-6 or 8-8-8. Apply 1 pound fertilizer per year of tree age up to six years old. In other words, apply 3 pounds of fertilizer to a 3 year old tree or 6 pounds of fertilizer to a 10 or 15 year old tree. Spread the fertilizer evenly under the drip line of the tree and out beyond the drip line 2-3 feet. Avoid digging holes in the ground and filling the holes with fertilizer which many people think is a proper fertilization technique. Fertilizer stakes pressed into the ground under the tree probably will not provide sufficient nutrients. If you choose to use slow release high concentration fertilizer make sure that the tree is receiving the recommended amount of

fertilizer.

Greasy spot fungus can be a problem on sweet oranges, particularly Hamlin, grapefruit and specialities varieties such as tangerines. This fungus infects the leaves and fruit during the summer and causes leaf drop during the winter months. Ideally you should make two applications of horticultural oil-one in mid June and the other in late August to control this fungus. If you use just one application make it in late August.

VEGETABLE GARDENING

Vegetables for June Planting -

Boniato, calabaza, chayote, cherry tomatoes, dasheen, malanga, okra, roselle, southern peas, Seminole pumpkin, sweet cassava, sweet potatoes and yard long beans.



Soil Solarization - Since Vapam is now a restricted pesticide the homeowner does not have any way, other than soil solarization, to reduce fungus, weeds and nematodes in the home garden. The soil solarization technique has at times given quite good control of the above problems. To solarize your garden soil, start by adding appropriate amounts of fertilizer, dolomite or other amendments. These are tilled into the soil to a depth of 6-8 inches. The garden area is then irrigated and covered with a light clear plastic. Irrigation water can be added to the top of the plastic sheeting to help seal the plastic to the soil surface. This operation probably should be started in June. The plastic should be left on the garden area for several weeks, then removed and the soil retilled and irrigated and the plastic returned. At planting time, the plastic is removed and the garden is planted with no further soil preparation. Check with Polk County Extension Office for more detailed information.

MISCELLANEOUS JUNE GARDENING ACTIVITIES

Annuals to be Planted - celosia, coleus, dusty miller, crossandra, hollyhock, impatiens, vinca, ornamental pepper, portulaca, salvia, torenia, and zinnia.

Perennials to be Planted - gallardia, gazania, periwinkle, blue sage, coreopsis, daylily, gerbera, jacobinia, pentas, ruellia, shasta daisy, stokes aster, verbena, aztec lily, butterfly lily, crinum, clivia, gladiolus, moracea, spider lily, and walking iris.

Herbs to be Planted - basil, borage, catnip, ginger, lemon balm, marjoram, mint, oregano, rosemary, summer savory, and thyme.

Palms - Early summer is an ideal time to plant or transplant palms. Make sure your palms are well fertilized with nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium and magnesium.

Irrigation System - If you don't have a rainfall cut-off device on your sprinkler system, now is a good time to install one. Don't allow your irrigation system to run the day after a good rainfall. Check output and uniformity of irrigation water with coffee cans. Take time to learn how to manually operate your irrigation system.

Have a good gardening day,
David Shibles
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For gardening information
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>

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