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WEST NILE VIRUS

I know that many of you have been reading and hearing a lot about West Nile virus through the various media. I therefore don't want to burden you with information that you have already heard or read. However, I do want to make a few relevant comments concerning this problem in Florida. West Nile virus is a type of encephalitis, which is transmitted by mosquitoes and ticks, and can be severe in the elderly. Symptoms include elevated fever that comes on very fast. Other symptoms include severe headache, a rash, swollen lymph nodes, gastrointestinal problems, and pain associated with the eyes, muscles and back. Death occurs in a few cases.

As of July 26, 2001 there were 21 wild birds, three horses, and one human that were confirmed or presumptive West Nile virus positive from several Florida Panhandle counties. The wild birds were from Jefferson, Leon, Madison, Okaloosa, Taylor and Washington counties. The horses were all from Jefferson County and the human case is from Madison County. A sentinel chicken was confirmed positive in Duval County. There are no confirmed cases in central or north central Florida at the present time, however the mosquitoes are probably here that can transmit the disease. Therefore, everyone should do their best to avoid mosquito bites and eliminate breeding sites around the house in old tires, flower pots, bird baths, etc.

You can find up to date information at the following web site: http://eis.ifas.ufl.edu which is the encephalitis information system provided by the University of Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory. You can also find literature on West Nile Virus at the University of Florida web site: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu. Since West Nile virus is fatal to some birds, the State of Florida encourages you to report any dead birds that you find in your yard, particularly crows. If you have a computer with an internet connection you can report directly on the website http://wld.fwc.state.fl.us/bird. Otherwise please call me at the Polk County Extension Office and I will make the report for you.

TURFGRASS

Fertilizer - With all of the summer rainfall, you may be seeing yellow areas in your Bahiagrass and St. Augustinegrass. This probably means a lack of nitrogen. Generally an application of slow release nitrogen is recommended in July, such as sewage sludge (8 pounds per 1000 square feet) or sulfur coated urea (1.3 pounds per 1000 square feet). However, applying nitrogen fertilizer in the summer is not always a good idea, because it encourages disease and insect problems. Many times the addition of iron (Fe) to these grasses will give the grass the desired green color, but does not stimulate excessive growth as does nitrogen fertilization. Usually 2 ounces per 3-5 gallons of water per 1000 square feet or a chelated iron source will provide the greening effect. The effect is only

temporary (approximately 2-4 weeks), therefore repeat applications will have to be made.

Turf Insects - Throughout the summer months be watching for **chinch bugs**. One of the best ways to check for these bugs is to get down on the knees and carefully inspect areas that may be yellowing or turning brown. Spread the grass blades apart are carefully look for small black bugs (1/8 inch) with silver wings (the wings lay flat on the bug's back). The young chinch bugs are red with a white line across their back. Damage is often seen first in the hotter areas such as along drive ways and sidewalks. Keep in mind that brown spots can also be caused by disease, drought and even objects buried beneath the turf. There are a number of acceptable alternatives to Dursban available at garden centers.

Within the next 2-3 weeks you will probably start to see brown moths flying over your St. Augustinegrass. The moths are **sod webworm** adults and are dingy brown with a wingspread of about 3/4 inch. They lay their eggs on the leaf blades. The larvae feed on leaf blades and cause considerable damage in about 2 weeks. The larvae are greenish with many black spots. They feed primarily at night and remain in a curled position on the soil surface during the day. To find them during the day, you will need to look on the soil surface. The damage appears in large circular areas and almost looks like the grass has been mowed very low. There are a number of products available for sod webworm control, however it is best to use a biological product such as Thuricide or Dipel

Learn to recognize these insects pests. The University of Florida has an excellent book with colored pictures for sale called "Insects and Related Pests of Turfgrass in Florida" by Donald Short (SP-140). Call the Extension office for ordering information.

Weeds in Turf - The first and best method of weed control begins with proper management practices which encourage a dense, thriving turf. Healthy turf shades the soil so sunlight can't reach weed seeds ready to germinate. A thick turf also minimizes the physical space available for weeds to become established.

An annual grass, called **basketgrass**, is quite troublesome in St. Augustine turf. It grows like a groundcover and is found predominantly in shady areas such as under oak trees where St. Augustinegrass may be somewhat thin. The leaves are light green, somewhat broad and slightly wavy. It is sometimes mistaken for annual jewgrass. Once established it is difficult to control. It is not a bad looking groundcover, where St. Augustine is very thin or has completely died out, but it dies in the fall leaving the ground bare, and regrows from seed in the spring. Asulox will control it, but it has been recently taken off the market and is not available to homeowners. A few commercial Pest Control Companies still have a small inventory of this product.

Asulox, also was the only product available for postemergence control of **crabgrass** in St. Augustinegrass lawns. Unfortunately, we don't have any other product to recommned for control of crabgrass during the summer months. There are a few products on the market that can be applied in the early spring which will kill the seed, but if the winter is mild, the adult plants will survive from year to year.

One of the most difficult problems to deal with is **bermudagrass** growing in St. Augustinegrass turf. It is generally difficult to control grassy weeds growing in a grass turf.

Call the Extension Office for control recommendations.

Another common weed growing in St. Augustinegrass is called **nutsedge**. The main stem is triangular-as the saying goes "sedges have edges". Sedges can be controlled with proper herbicide applications. Check with the Extension Office for recommendations.

If you have trouble identifying turf weeds, please feel free to bring them to the Extension Office in Bartow and we will be happy to examine them for you.

Turf Diseases - Watch for leaf spots such as gray leaf spot. Readily available turf fungicides will control this disease.

TREES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Most all of us agree that trees are very important to the homeowner for many reasons. They certainly shade our homes and may reduce cooling bill by as much as 40%. Have you ever noticed how cool it is under a large oak tree? Trees release a large amount of water through pores in their leaves in a process called transpiration. The evaporation of this water (evapotranspiration) creates a cool zone around the plant, and lowers the temperature as much 9 degrees Fahrenheit.

Trees also play an important environmental role, especially in cleansing the air. A large tree will intercept approximately 50 pounds of particulate matter (dust) per year. Trees remove carbon dioxide from the air and reduce the level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. The USDA estimates that each tree removes 13 pounds of carbon from the air annually. In the process trees release oxygen.

Trees reduce runoff and soil erosion up to 35% by intercepting rainfall in the canopy and aiding water percolation into the soil. And trees undoubtedly increase the value of the property. These are only a few of the assets of trees in the landscape. We therefore need to be very concerned with their protection.

Many people think that trees in Florida have deep tap roots like in other parts of the U.S. However, the truth is that most trees don't have deep tap roots. Most of their roots are in the top 2-3 feet of soil and may grow out to 3 times the diameter of the drip line. The tree receives its nutrients from fine feeder roots growing from larger lateral roots. The feeder roots are generally found in the upper 12 inches of soil. It is obvious how construction projects such as irrigation systems and swimming pool installation can have a serious impact on the health of nearby trees. Also putting more than 2 inches of soil over the root zone (under the drip line) of a tree may suffocate the roots. Conversely, reducing the level by more than 2 inches will also adversely affect the tree.

When selecting a site to plant a tree keep in mind the roots may spread 3 times the diameter of the drip line. If you have a septic tank close by, then you need to think about planting a smaller tree or shrub, such as a crape myrtle, Chinese elm, fringe tree, glossy privet, hollies, loquat, orchid tree, red bud, etc. We recommend that you don't plant a small tree within 10 feet from a house and a larger tree at least 20 feet.

MISC AUGUST ACTIVITIES

Vegetable Gardens - Now is the time to start preparing your garden for the fall planting. Vegetables that can be planted in mid-August include pumpkins, summer and winter squash, peppers, watermelons, broccoli, pole beans, sweet corn, egg plant, collards, and onions.

Long season crops like tomatoes need to be planted as early as possible to avoid December frosts and freezes. However, if they are planted in August, they may not set fruit well and they may become infected with fungus and bacteria. To avoid cold weather and root knot nematodes, I recommend planting tomatoes in containers in September, October and November-just remember to bring them inside when cold weather arrives in December.

Soil Testing - Have the pH checked in your vegetable garden, turf or flower beds. Don't add lime unless it is necessary.

Crape Myrtles - Clip off the spent blooms so seed pods don't develop. This should stimulate more blooms.

Flowers to Plant - Angelonia, begonia, black-eyed Susan vine, blue daze, bush daisy, cat's whiskers, coleus, coreopsis, crossandra, golden globe, impatiens, marigold, melampodium, moon flower, pentas, periwinkle, porter weed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, sunflower, torenia, and zinnia.

Pruning - Prune bouganvillea as necessary by the middle of the month. Pruning time is over for camellias and azaleas.

Most evergreens, such as viburnum, ligustrum, feijoa and Indian Hawthorn, should be given a pruning at this time.

Hedges and ground covers often grow out of control this time of year. Now is a good time to reshape as needed.

Pruning time is over for camellias and azaleas. They probably should not be pruned after the end of June to avoid destroying next years bloom.

Water Conservation - Remember we are still in a drought. In spite of all the recent rainfall water levels are still are record lows. Use drip irrigation and mulch all plantings. Low volume irrigation can be used any day of the week. Determine the output of your irrigation system and make necessary repairs. Use the right plant in the right place. Amend the soil with compost to improve it's water holding capacity.

Citrus - Apply a horticultural oil for control of greasy spot. Remove dead wood

Have a Good Gardening Day,

David Shibles
Environmental Horticulturist
Polk County

For Gardening Information
http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu

For Polk County Extension Information
http://polk.ifas.ufl.edu

Master Gardener Training **-** Master Gardening Training will be offered again this year starting September 19 and will be given every Wednesday for 12 weeks. Please call the Polk County Extension Office for details at 533-0765.