

# Urban Horticulturer

June 2002

## TURF

**Irrigation** - The rule of thumb for irrigation timing in June is every 3-5 days if it does not rain. With an occasional shower you should not have to irrigate more than once per week. If the grass blades are not folded towards the mid-rib, then the grass does not need water. If your watering days are Tuesday and Saturday, as mine are, and the grass is not wilted on Tuesday, you probably are safe to wait until Saturday to irrigate. Additionally, chances are good that you will receive a shower between Tuesday and Saturday. Don't automatically water twice per week, if it is not necessary.



If you see yellow or wilted areas in your lawn, it does not necessarily mean that you have insects or disease. First, check to make sure that these spots are receiving a similar amount of irrigation compared to green areas. You cannot tell by observing the system in operation, because it may **appear** that the spots are receiving adequate coverage. You need to put out coffee cans (or some other container with a flat bottom such as a tuna can), in the yellow and the green areas, to actually catch the water. Check the amount of water in both areas with a ruler. If necessary, make adjustments to your system. This will also tell you how much water you are applying to your entire lawn.

**Weed whacking** - Be careful when edging flower beds so that the weed whacker does not cut lower than the cut made by the lawn

mower. This is presuming the lawn mower is set as high as it will go. If the grass is scalped next to beds, driveways, islands, etc., the grass, particularly St. Augustine, will die back away from the bed and leave bare areas which will support weed growth. If you see your lawn maintenance service scalping areas next to beds with weed whackers, make sure you tell them to be more careful.

Also, weed whacking too close to trees and shrubs will open wounds in which fungus can attack the plant. Citrus is commonly attacked by Phytophthora foot rot which enters the tree through wounds on the lower trunk. This ultimately ends in the death of the tree.

**Chinch bugs** - As you folks who have St. Augustine lawns know, now is chinch bug season. Carefully examine the border of those yellow spots for chinch bugs. They often get started in hotter areas first, such as along driveways and sidewalks. Garden stores have safer, effective replacements for Dursban and Diazinon.

**Mole crickets** - This is the most important insect pest of bahiagrass and bermudagrass. If you notice the characteristic humps running just underneath the soil surface, then you may need to make a treatment. If you are not sure if you have an infestation, use a soap flush (2 tablespoons dish soap in 2 gallons water) poured onto a 2 x 2 square foot area. Within a few minutes, the mole crickets come to the surface. If you have two or more per square foot, treatment is needed.



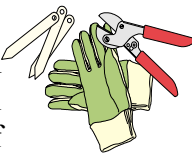
There is a nematode product called Nematac S which is available to homeowners in Polk County for control of mole crickets. It seems to control nematodes quite well, but is relatively expensive. Another biological control method, (not available to the public) utilizes parasitic wasps (*Larra* species). Hopefully, a release program will be started soon in Polk County. You can learn about this parasite at <http://molecrickets.ifas.ufl.edu>. This wasp has been established in the Gainesville area for some time and is controlling about 80-90% of the mole crickets.

## PLANT DISEASES

During the summer months in Florida, we have high temperatures and usually lots of rain. And with the rain, which we need, come additional problems with our plants. We don't need these problems, but we must, as Florida gardeners, learn to live with them. It is often a difficult adjustment for new residents to garden in Florida.



Plant problems come in many forms and disguises. These problems can be broken down into three categories - injuries, disorders, and diseases. Injuries and disorders are **not** associated with a pathogen. Injuries include lightning strikes, mechanical damage, pesticides, animal damage, etc. Disorders include cold or heat stress, nutritional (usually deficiencies), air pollution, excessive rainfall, drought, etc. A disease occurs when the normal growth of a plant is disrupted by a fungal, bacterial, or viral infection. It is obvious that separating out these problems is a job for Sherlock Holmes. When trying to figure out what is wrong with your plants, you must gather as much evidence as possible. Sometimes, I can help you diagnose the problem and suggest a



cure.

**Sooty mold** - The fact that a fungus is found on a plant does not necessarily mean that the fungus is a disease that harms the plant. Sooty mold is a black fungus often found on the leaves of gardenias, citrus trees, and many other plants. However, sooty mold is not a plant disease and is not very harmful, although it is unsightly.

The sooty mold grows on the honeydew excreted by certain sucking insects such as aphids, scales, mealybugs, and whiteflies. It can usually be rubbed off the leaves with one's fingers or washed off with a hose. Any real damage to the plants is done by these insects rather than the sooty mold, so when you see sooty mold, you should start looking for the insects causing the problem. If you control the insects, sooty mold will cease to be a problem. Soaps and horticultural oils will control most sucking insects.

**Water spreads diseases** - Wet weather results in increased disease problems on a number of plants, including lawn grasses. Many fungal and bacterial diseases cannot spread from one plant to another, or from one leaf to another on the same plant, unless the plant is wet for several hours. Are you misting your house plants daily or wetting the foliage when you water them? Some plants appreciate misting and some actually require it, but in other cases you may be contributing to the spread of disease by regularly wetting the leaves.



Fungus spores will not germinate on dry leaves, and bacteria also need moisture before they can infect plants. Some diseases are air borne and may be spread by winds, but splashing water from rain or irrigation is a common way in which plant diseases are spread.

**Controlling diseases** - Fungicides are helpful in controlling certain plant diseases, but they must be applied properly to be effective, and

they cannot control all types of fungi, let alone bacteria and viruses. Unlike insecticides, which usually kill the organisms causing the problem, fungicides generally do not kill the fungus, but merely prevent it from spreading and infecting the treated parts of plants. Even if you treat a plant with a fungicide, it is important to remove the diseased portions of the plant. Otherwise, the disease will still be present and may spread when the fungicide dissipates.



Sanitation, or the removal of the diseased parts of plants, is one of the most important ways of controlling many diseases. Sanitation includes the pruning of diseased leaves and branches as well as the removal of fallen plant parts. If diseased leaves, such as back spot of roses, are left on the ground under the plant, the plant can be easily reinfected.

Pesticides which are not applied properly can cause severe injury to your plants, especially if applied on hot sunny days. Many fungi attack plant leaves from the under side, so you need to make sure both sides of the leaves are being covered with spray. If you apply a fungicide, read the label carefully to be sure that it will be effective in controlling that particular disease on that particular plant or type of plant. You can consult the Extension Service or reliable garden centers for advice on plant disease identification and control. A number of broad spectrum fungicides are available to the homeowner at garden centers for a reasonable price such as coppers, Daconil, Dithane M-45, Maneb, sulfur and others.

Some plant diseases do not need treatment such as **oak leaf blister**. It is generally present every year. The disease results in slightly raised, blister-like spots on the leaves, which are light green at first and then turn brown. The oak tree leaves may drop prematurely, but the tree is seldom seriously injured.

Small oval galls are often seen on oaks as well and other trees. This appears to be some sort of fungal growth, but actually it is caused by an insect. If you cut one of the little galls in half, you will find a little grub in the middle. These do not cause serious injury to the trees.

Some plant diseases are soil borne, like mushroom root rot and wet rots, that affect the roots rather than the leaves and stems. These are common problems in azaleas, junipers, ligustrum, pittosporums, and others. If a plant suddenly and mysteriously wilts and dies, even though it has been receiving enough water, the cause is often mushroom root rot or some other root disease like Phytophthora. Look for mushrooms growing on the trunk near the soil, or peel off the bark on the trunk or roots near the soil line and look for an abnormal white fungal growth underneath the bark. The plant can be sent to University of Florida for positive diagnosis (\$20.00 fee).

If a plant has root rot, there is not too much that can be done by the homeowner to save the plant. If the disease has not progressed too far, then the soil around the plant can be treated with a fungicide called Subdue, however there is no guarantee that this treatment will work and Subdue is very expensive.



Another option is to remove the plant and soil and allow the area to be exposed to the sun for a couple of months, then fill the open hole with fresh soil and put in a new plant. A new plant probably will survive for some time, but eventually may succumb to the same disease. The soil in the affected area can be fumigated, but it must be done by a professional with a license. This treatment will kill adjoining plants.

## MISC. JUNE GARDENING

Flowering plants for June - Angelonia,

begonias, bush daisy, butterfly plant, caladium, cat's whiskers, celosia, coleus, coreopsis, Dahlberg daisy, fire spike, four o'clock, gaillardia, gerbera daisy, ginger, goldenrod, impatiens, kalanchoe, lantana, lion's ear, marigolds, melampodium, Mexican sunflower, moon flower, nierembergia, porterweed, pentas, periwinkle, portulaca, purslane, salvia, shrimp plant, Stokes aster, sunflower, torenia and zinnias.

**Vegetable planting for June** - Boniato, calabaza, chayote, cherry tomatoes, dasheen, malanga, okra, roselle, southern peas, Seminole pumpkin, sweet cassava, sweet potatoes and yard long beans.

**Citrus** - If you did not make your second application of fertilizer to mature citrus trees then it should be done now. Apply an application of horticultural oil or basic copper to all citrus trees during late June or early July for control of greasy spot. Greasy spot infect leaves in the summer months and causes the leaves to fall prematurely in the winter.

## PROGRAMS

**Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program** - This program is now under way in Polk County (see attachment). The program is designed to show homeowners ways to save water and reduce runoff which pollutes our waterways. Our FYN representative, Anne Macloskey, will discuss with you and/or send you literature on how you can have a Certified Florida Yard. Then, upon your request, Ms. Macloskey or a certified FYN Advisor will visit your home and evaluate your landscape management practices on a point basis. You will have to accumulate 36 inches (points) out of a possible 103 inches (points) to have a Certified Florida Yard. The requirements are spelled out in the FYN literature. You can reach Ms. Macloskey at (863)519-8677 ext. 121.

**Summer Programs** - I will be presenting four Saturday morning programs during the months of July and August. The programs will be conducted at the Polk County Agricultural Center and will run from 9 a.m. until 12 noon. The programs are as follows: July 20 - Turf Management, July 27 - Dooryard Citrus Management, August 3 - Waterwise Landscaping, August 10 - Insects In and Around Your Home. These programs are open to the public (registration fee is \$10.00), which covers all the programs. If you are interested in attending, please call or come by the Polk County Cooperative Extension Office and make reservations, because seating will be limited.

Have a good gardening day,

David Shibles  
Environmental Horticulturist  
Polk County

For gardening information:  
<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>  
<http://hort.ifas.ufl.edu>  
<http://turf.ufl.edu>  
<http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu>

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

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