

Urban Horticulturer

July 2002

PROGRAM NOTE

Don't forget we are doing four Saturday morning programs starting on July 20th (lawns), July 27th (dooryard fruit), August 3rd (waterwise landscapes) and August 10th (insects in and around the home including termites). The programs will be held at the Extension Office in Bartow. There is a \$10.00 registration fee. You can attend any one or all of the programs.

TURF

Fertilizer - At this time of the year you often will see yellow spots in your lawn due to a lack of nitrogen. Fertilizing with nitrogen in the summer is not always desirable because it encourages disease and insect problems. Many times the application of iron will provide the desirable green color, but does not stimulate excessive grass growth as does nitrogen fertilizer. Usually iron sulfate applied at 2 ounces per 3-5 gallons of water per 1000 square feet of lawn or some type of chelated iron will provide the greening effect. The effect from supplemental iron is only temporary (approximately 2-4 weeks), therefore repeat applications are necessary for summer long color.

For a St. Augustine lawn with a basic fertility program, the University of Florida recommends a complete fertilizer application in March, an iron application in July followed by a complete fertilizer application in September. The moderate fertilizer program calls for a complete fertilizer in March, slow release nitrogen in May, such as Milorganite, an application of iron in July, another

application of slow release nitrogen in August, followed by the complete fertilizer in October.

We encourage you to use a complete fertilizer with 30-50% slow release nitrogen. A complete fertilizer is one that has all the major nutrients, including nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium. In addition, some complete fertilizers may contain other nutrients such as iron, magnesium and manganese which may be important to the health of your lawn.

To determine the amount of slow release nitrogen (water insoluble nitrogen) look on the label under nitrogen and you will see the percent of water insoluble nitrogen or you may see an asterisk and a footnote with the amount of slowly available (slow release) nitrogen.

These fertilizers with slow release nitrogen may be hard to find. Lesco makes a number of slow release fertilizers such as a 15-0-15 and 15-5-15. The first number stands for nitrogen, the second number for phosphorous and the third for potassium. The 15-5-15 is available at their Lakeland Store while the 15-0-15 is available at Home Depot. I don't recommend using the 15-0-15 unless you have a soil fertility test done to determine the amount of phosphorous in your soil. The 15-0-15 of course does not have any phosphorous, and we encourage you not to use phosphorous unless your landscape is deficient. Phosphorous is available in most Polk County soils, however in some cases it is low.

Lesco makes another product which they call a "landscape and ornamental fertilizer". It has a 12-2-14 ratio, which means 12% nitrogen,

2% phosphorous, and 14% potassium. In addition it has 2% magnesium, 4% iron and 2.5% manganese. The nitrogen is at least 35% slow release, and the potassium is 30% slow release. This or a similar product is an excellent choice for your shrubs, and I believe it would be an excellent choice for your lawn. It is, however, more expensive than most other fertilizers other than the poly coated slow release products.

Diseases - With all the rain that we are having, you may experience fungus problems in your lawn. Gray leaf spot is a common problem and affects Bahia, Bermuda, and St. Augustinegrass. St. Augustinegrass is the most susceptible, particularly Bitter-blue cultivars. Conditions are optimal for this disease during the humid summer months. Prolonged wet foliage and excess available nitrogen favor the severity and spread of the disease.

Gray leaf spot lesions start as small brown spots which enlarge to oval and elongated areas on the leaves and stems. Mature lesions appear brown to ash colored with definite brown to purple margins. Avoid excess nitrogen and water deeply and only when needed in the morning hours. For chemical control, you will need to use products like Dithane or Manzate 200 DF. A product like Banner EC can be used but it is expensive and not readily available to homeowners.

The loss of Daconil as a homeowner turf fungicide has created somewhat of a void for chemical control of turf diseases. The product was removed because of the danger to children playing in the grass and the danger to homeowner handlers. However, Immunox (myclobutanil) is commonly available at garden centers and controls Anthracnose, bermudagrass decline, brown patch, dollar spot, Helminthosporium leaf spot, and rust. But, it does not control gray leaf spot.

Bayleton is also available in small quantities at certain garden centers and controls or prevents some turf diseases such as Anthracnose, Bermudagrass decline, dollar spot and rust. Bayleton can be used as a preventative control for take-all root rot in St. Augustine grass.

MOSQUITOES

If your yard is anything like mine, it may be overrun by mosquitoes. I guess we have to take the mosquitoes with the rain which we desperately need. However, we need to remember that these mosquitoes transmit diseases. West Nile Virus (WNV) and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) are two mosquito-borne illnesses that infect birds, some animals, and humans. A case of EEE in an elderly donkey was confirmed in Hillsborough County on June 21, 2002. Equine owners are urged to get their animals vaccinated.



Report dead birds through the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission's web site at <http://wld.fwc.state.fl.us/bird> or by calling Florida Department of Health at (800) 871-9703. If you are going to be working outside in your yard protect yourself with appropriate clothing and use repellents such as those with DEET.

You probably have read or heard about some new devices on the market that use attractants such as carbon dioxide and octenol to lure and trap mosquitoes. These devices are expensive and require regular refueling. The manufacturers claim that this product will remove these annoying pests from your yard, however there isn't any scientific research to back up these claims. Female mosquitoes are attracted to carbon dioxide and the traps will capture large numbers of mosquitoes. However, there are 77 species of mosquitoes

in Florida which vary in what host they bite, the time of day they feed and how far they can fly. Not all of the troublesome mosquitoes will be trapped and the ones that aren't trapped will probably be replaced by others from next door.

There is another product on the market and is available at discount stores for control of mosquitoes. The manufacturer recommends a small version for use on enclosed patios and a larger one for outside use. The unit has a candle in the bottom covered by a plastic lamp shade with a hole in the top. An allethrin impregnated strip fits into the open top. The heat from the burning candles causes the insecticide to be released from the treated strip. I bought one of these for use on my screened patio. I have not had enough time to really check out its effectiveness, but it is quite expensive to buy the refill candles and treated strips. One candle and strip only lasts 3-4 hours.

As you probably know, the University of Florida Extension does not recommend the use of cypress for homeowner mulch. It does make a good mulch, but living cypress trees are being cut down to make the mulch. Unfortunately, cypress mulch is the one currently most available at a relatively low price. Eucalyptus mulch is available at some Home Depot Stores, but is quite expensive. Of course, the yard trash mulch is available from the land-fill.



A new product called Florimulch will be available at Home Depot stores within 2-3 weeks. This product is made from melaleuca trees, which are commonly called punk trees. This is one of the top five invasive plants in the State of Florida, so we are glad to use it

for mulch. The plant was originally introduced into the south Florida Everglades in the 1930's. The intent was to use the tree to de-water the Everglades to enhance development. The punk tree is extremely prolific and has rapidly spread through south and central Florida out competing other native and exotic plants.

The punk tree can survive severe frost damage, grows 3-6 feet per year, re-sprouts from stumps and roots, and will flower 2 years after seed germination. It flowers and produces fruit all year round and produces 20 million wind-borne seeds per year, per tree, and is able to hold viable seed for massive all-at-once releases when stressed. It releases volatile oils into the air, especially when blooming, that cause respiratory irritation, asthma attacks, headaches, and/or rashes in some people.

In spite of all the negative qualities of the tree, it appears to make an excellent mulch which is more resistant than other wood mulches to termite feeding. The mulch will be chipped and composted for several weeks so that all seeds will germinate and die. I have not heard of anyone having any kind of allergic reaction to the mulch, but we will keep a close watch on the potential problem. It looks just about like cypress mulch. If you buy some, let me know how you like it.

MISC. JULY GARDENING

Soil Solarization - Many gardens that are used over and over again every year build up a variety of soil pathogens, weeds and nematodes. At one time a soil fumigant was available to homeowners (Vapam) for treating garden areas, however this has been taken off the market. Soil solarization offers an acceptable alternative method of control.

Spade or roto-till your garden area and remove all debris, weeds, etc. Rake the area smooth and level, and cover with thin clear plastic. Seal the edges of the plastic with soil, wood, rocks, etc. The sunlight will penetrate the clear plastic and cook the soil down to several inches, killing weeds, pathogens, and nematodes. In September, remove the plastic and plant directly into the soil with no further soil preparation. If you roto-till the soil at this time, then you will bring pathogens back to the surface.

Citrus - If you have not already done so, spray all of your citrus trees with horticultural oil for control of greasy spot fungus.

Bird of Paradise - Many of you may have trouble getting these plants to bloom, which is understandable, because they can be reluctant to bloom the first 2-3 years. The plants typically need full sun or partial shade, however I have seen them blooming in just about full shade. During the first 2-3 years, feed every 6-8 weeks with a general fertilizer. Keep the soil moist and cover the root zone with mulch. Then, when the plants are well established, water only when the soil is dry to the touch, and switch fertilizing to March, June and September with a bloom buster fertilizer (high phosphorous). Avoid disturbing the plant by moving to a new

location, and prune out dead growth. Remove or trim nearby plants which may be competing for water and nutrients. Control white scale with horticultural oil.

Flowers to Plant - Angelonia, begonia, black eyed Susan, 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.

Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program - If any of you would like to have information on how to create a Florida Certified Yard or would like to have your yard inspected and certified, call Anne Macloskey at (863) 519-8677 ext. 121.

Winter Haven Office - The Winter Haven office is now open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Tel. 401-2458). The building is located in the Gil Jones Center (old State Farm Building) just north of Winter Haven Ford on Highway 17.

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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