

Urban Horticulturer

October 2002

TURF

Fertilizer - If you didn't fertilize your lawn in September, you should make your final fertilizer application of the year during October to both St. Augustine lawns and Bahiagrass lawns. As I often say, use a complete fertilizer (Nitrogen-Phosphorous-Potassium) such as 15-5-15 (2% iron), 15-0-15 (2% iron), 9-2-24 (6% iron) or 12-2-14 (4.5% iron). Of course you can use the old stand-bys like 16-4-8, but the fall is a critical time to add additional potassium which promotes strong root growth, so it's better to use at least as much potassium as nitrogen. Also, look at that label to see how much of the nitrogen is in a water insoluble (slow release) form. The Lesco 9-2-24 has both slow release nitrogen and potassium.

Insects - Continue to watch for chinch bugs in St. Augustine lawns. I have received many calls from homeowners who think they have a disease in their lawn, when actually they have a combination of disease and chinch bugs or just chinch bugs. We are still not seeing many sod webworms or fall armyworms.



Mole crickets, which are reaching maturity at this time, are quite difficult to control due to their large size, so you may want to call in a professional lawn service. The ideal time to treat for mole crickets in Bahiagrass is in mid- June.

Weed control - You may be seeing quite a few weeds in your St. Augustine and

Bahiagrass lawns. Some of the more difficult to control weeds, like creeping beggar weed, probably should be pulled out or sprayed with a non-selective herbicide such as Roundup, Finale or diquat and then plug or sod the dead areas. If you are careful, you may only hit the weeds.

Diquat is sold under the trade name Reward and has a desiccant action rather than systemic activity like Roundup and Finale. A desiccant removes the moisture from the green tissue causing the tissue to die, however the plant may grow back from the roots.



You can use a weed and feed material which has both fertilizer and herbicide. There are those with 2,4-D for Bahiagrass and those with Atrazine for St. Augustine lawns. It is ok to use these products in the fall, however, I would encourage you to apply the herbicides separately only to the weed infested parts of your lawn.

Turf types - I'm happy to say that we have nearly completed a small turf demonstration garden at the Extension Office. We now have on display two types of St. Augustine turf - Bitter Blue and Floratam, Seashore paspalum (Sea Isle 1), Empire Zoysiagrass, and Tifton 419 Bermudagrass (mostly for golf courses and athletic fields). We plan to add common Bermudagrass (home lawns), a dwarf St. Augustinegrass like Delmar and Argentine Bahiagrass. You are welcome to visit the Extension Office and look at the plots.

The Seashore Paspalum was planted from root bound plugs last fall and it has never really fully recovered. We are still trying to improve the quality of this planting. It should look much nicer than it actually does. Seashore Paspalum is a medium maintenance turf. It will grow in a wide range of soil types, has a fine to medium leaf blade (is nicer looking than it's cousin Bahiagrass), has good drought tolerance, has excellent salt tolerance (some cultivars can be watered with salt water), has good to excellent wear tolerance, and has good nematode tolerance. However, it has poor shade tolerance.

HOLIDAY PLANTS

October is a critical month for holiday plants such as Christmas cactus, poinsettias and kalanchoes. Around mid-October the days become short enough to trigger the flowering process. At this point in the fall, these holiday plants should receive no nighttime light and they should not receive any pruning because developing flower buds may be removed.

Many gardeners have holiday cactus that have been in the family for many years. Some have been traded from friend to friend or have been passed down from generation to generation. They are called Thanksgiving cactus if they bloom during Thanksgiving and Christmas cactus when they flower in December.

Your Christmas cactus plants should be developing small greenish swelling buds at the end of the stems. They are small and bead-like at first, but quickly enlarge and become pointed as they develop color. If you don't see buds by early November, your holiday cactus may be getting nighttime light.

Care for your holiday plants by watering when the soil surface is dry to the touch. Fertilize Christmas cactus monthly with a

soluble fertilizer such as Miracle-Gro from March through September. Fertilize pot grown poinsettias and kalanchoes every other week. Do not fertilize the plants during the fall and winter months. Keep poinsettias in the full sun. Kalanchoes and Christmas cactus should be kept in light shade. Keep the blooming plants away from heat sources and breezes which will dry out the flowers. Pick off declining bloom as needed.

PEST ALERT

Cycad aulacaspis scale (Aulacaspis yasumatsui) -

This is a scale which has been attacking and killing sago palms in south Florida for several years. This pest is now in central Florida and causing extensive damage to our sagos. It is being called Asian scale or Cycad scale, but the common name, at this time, is cycad aulacaspis scale. It appears that this scale mainly attacks king and queen sagos. We have mainly King Sagos in central Florida. Other cycads such as coonties and cardboard plants do not seem to be affected.

The cycad aulacaspis scale should not be confused with the magnolia white scale (Pseudoaulacapsis cockerelli) routinely found on sagos in central Florida. The magnolia white scale is usually found on the upper leaves while the aulacaspis scale is usually found on the bottom leaves. A heavy infestation of cycad aulacaspis scale looks like a fresh snow fall on the bottom surface of the leaves. This pest will readily kill the plant if treatments are not made.

If you see this insect on your sago palms, then you should begin treatment as soon as possible. At this time we are recommending treatment with a product called Organocide, which is a sprayable fish oil, that has been successfully used in south Florida at a rate of 1 part fish oil to 100 parts water. At the

present time I'm not sure if this product is available at our garden centers, but hopefully they will begin to carry it.

If Organocide is not available, then use a typical spray oil such as Volck oil which is available locally. Spray the bottom and top side of leaves and the trunk 5 times at 10 day intervals. It may be convenient to use a pump-up 1 quart sprayer. Use a stick or similar object to hold the fronds upright so you can thoroughly spray the underside of the leaves. Remove any frond which is more than half dead and place it in a plastic bag for disposal.

Cygon (dimethoate), a systemic insecticide, has been effective at times, but ineffective at other times. It is believed, but unproven, that insecticide uptake by sagos varies with physiological condition of the plant and products like Cygon may, at times, not be absorbed by the plant.

This scale tenaciously holds on to the leaf tissue even after it is dead, which leads some people to continue to spray many more times than is necessary. Frequent spraying with a garden hose may help to wash off dead individuals.

A characteristic of this insect which makes it difficult to totally control is that it attacks roots, stems and fronds. The individuals on the roots will not be fully exposed to sprays and may survive foliar treatment. There are a few systemic insecticides such as Merit (imidacloprid) which can be used as a drench along with the oil sprays, however, Merit is very expensive and probably out of reach for most homeowners. In any case, Merit like Cygon, for unexplained reasons does not always seem to work. So for the time being, if you have an infestation, thoroughly spray with Organocide or with horticultural oil sprays several times at weekly intervals, as I

previously mentioned. I will keep you updated with any new control measures.

You can find literature on this pest at the University of Florida web site <http://creatures.ifas.ufl.edu> under the common name aulacaspis scale. If you don't have an inter-net connection, I will mail you literature.

MISC. OCTOBER GARDENING

Citrus - Make your final application of a complete fertilizer for the year.

I have received a number of calls concerning splitting fruit. This is normal during variable weather. We actually have three major times when fruit drops from citrus. One is immediately after flowering, then there is a June fruit drop and one during the fall. It's the trees way of regulating what it can hold. With excessive rains, the fruit splitting appears to increase.

After the fruit splits, it may start to turn orange like it is ripening, then fall to the ground. Also after the fruit splits, either in the tree or on the ground, a small fungus beetle may enter the fruit through the split and feed on developing fungus. This beetle is purely a secondary pest and usually will not attack healthy fruit. Be sure to remove all fallen fruit from under the tree.

Shrubs - Fertilize all shrubs with a complete fertilizer. However, keep in mind fertilizer will encourage additional growth.

Vegetables to plant - beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, collards, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onion, peas, potatoes, radicchio, radish, rhubarb, roquette, rutabaga, spinach, strawberry, Swiss chard, and turnip.

Flowers to plant - African daisy, alyssum,

angelonia, ageratum, begonia, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, calendula, candytuft, celosia, chrysanthemums, cleome, coleus, cornflower, cosmos, dianthus, dusty miller, gaillardia, gazania, geraniums, gerberas, heliotrope, hollyhock, impatiens, larkspur, lobelia, nicotiana, pentas, petunia, salvia, snapdragon, sunflower, verbena and zinnia.

Soil Testing - Have your soil pH checked. The Master Gardeners will conduct this test for you for a \$3.00 fee. These tests are conducted every Thursday morning. You also have the option of sending your soil to the University of Florida Soils Laboratory. They will check pH for \$3.00 and soil nutrients for \$4.00 dollars.

Cold damage to susceptible plants - We are not too many weeks away from the time when temperatures will dip into the 50's. You need to be aware that plants such as pothos, aglaonema, episcia, heliconia, peperomia and dieffenbachia can be damaged when temperatures hit the low 50's, particularly episcia. Temperatures in the 40's may kill these plants. Be thinking about a place to put these plants when they need to be brought inside.

Before bringing them inside, wash the foliage with soapy water to remove bugs and remove yellowing and declining leaves. Provide a bright spot for them inside and reduce fertilizer applications to every other month.

Melaleuca mulch (Florimulch) - A few weeks ago I reported to you that this mulch would be available at Home Depot stores in the Lakeland area. It is apparently available to Home Depot Stores from the manufacturer (Forestry Resources Landscape Supply), but the Home Depots in the Lakeland area have decided not to stock it at this time. Some Home Depot stores are carrying this product. The closest store is on Highway 60 in Valrico.

Master Gardener Calendars - The Master Gardeners thank you for your calendar orders. If any of you readers want more calendars for yourself or for gifts, please call Gail at the Extension Office, (863) 519-8677, Ext 111. This calendar would make a nice Christmas gift for your gardening friends.

Have a good gardening day,

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Polk County

For gardening information:

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