

Urban Horticulturer

November 2002

TURF

Fertilization - Now is just about the last time to fertilize your St. Augustine turf. Use a complete fertilizer such as 15-5-15 with slow release nitrogen at 1 pound nitrogen per 1000 square feet turf (100 divided by 15 = 6.67's 5 pounds actual fertilizer per 1000 square feet). You also may want to consider applying an additional 1 pound of potassium to the St. Augustine turf at the end of November. As I have mentioned before, we feel that potassium will build strong roots and make the turf more drought tolerant in the spring. Potassium can burn the leaf blades so it needs to be watered in after application.

Insect and Disease Problems - I am still seeing live chinch bugs damaging St. Augustine lawns. So, carefully evaluate any brown spots to make sure you are treating for the right problem. Eliminate the possibility of chinch bugs, mole crickets, web worms (soap flushes or coffee can float) or drought (check irrigation output) before assuming you have a fungus problem. When you are satisfied that the problem is not insect or drought, then start considering possible fungus problems.



As it gets cooler, we will see more brown patch fungus which is a disease of St. Augustinegrass. Brown patch is different than Take-all root rot as it occurs in the spring and fall and attacks above ground parts of St. Augustine. The sheath from which the blade grows becomes rotten and the blade can be

easily pulled from the sheath. Take-all root rot does not attack above ground plants, but causes the roots to decay and turn black and is mainly a problem in the wet, humid summer months.

Also, as the weather cools off, reduce your watering time to once per week or less. If you continue to water twice per week, then you are inviting fungus problems like brown patch. Once we get into December and January, watering once every other week should be sufficient. Water when the grass begins to show signs of water stress.

The University of Florida has a publication which will help you figure out which turf disease you might have. For those of you with computers, it is on the edis web-site. The title is "Disease Control in Turf: Key for Identification of Turf Diseases". The edis number is PG066. This publication breaks up the fungus diseases into categories - brown patch or not, size of patch, are mushrooms present, are roots black, are there orange pustules, type of leaf spot, etc. Once you have decided on the disease, then you can check again on edis for the publication - "Disease Control in Turf: Common Turf Diseases (PG067)" which discusses symptoms, chemical control (disregard the recommendations for chlorothalonil-Daconil) and cultural control measures. If you don't have a computer, call the Extension Office and we will send you copies. Treat the diseased areas, following the label recommendations, until the brown spots stop enlarging.

Herbicides - If you have dollar weed persisting or annual winter weeds coming up, then a herbicide can still be applied such as atrazine on St. Augustinegrass or 2,4-D products on Bahiagrass, but time is running out. You really don't want to stress the turf with a herbicide just before cold weather nor do you want to encourage a lot of new growth which could be damaged by an early freeze. November is really the last time that you should apply fertilizer or herbicides before February.

Sod Replacement - There is still time to sprig or sod damaged areas of your turf. Don't lay sod on top of existing weeds or old sod. Kill the persistent weeds with a herbicide like Roundup or pull them up by hand. Clean the areas of dead roots and other debris and till or spade the soil 6-8 inches deep. It is a good idea to add a slow release fertilizer, such as Milorganite, or the area could be amended with a composted manure if you have very sandy soil with few nutrients. Water well before sprigging or laying sod and then water lightly every day until the sod pegs down. Fertilize lightly in about 3-4 weeks.

SHRUB PLANTINGS

Now is probably one of the least stressful times (for us and the plants) of the year to plant shrubs. Dig the planting hole 1-2 times larger than the root ball and no deeper than the root ball. I suggest soaking the pot in a water bath for an hour or so before planting, just in case the root ball has thoroughly dried out, which can happen in some retail garden centers from improper watering. When plant root balls thoroughly dry out, they become extremely difficult to wet again - just like soil that has thoroughly dried out. I'm sure at one time or another you have seen soil that has become so dry that you can



stand there with a hose and the water just runs off. This same thing can happen to a root ball, and once it is planted in this condition, it takes a lot of energy to re-wet it. The plant may then die from lack of water.

Remove the root ball from the container and determine if it is root bound. If the roots are circling around the outside edge of the root ball, then you probably should make 1 inch cuts from the top of the root ball to the bottom on four sides. Pull the cut roots slightly away from the root ball and place the it in the planting hole so that the top of the root ball is even with the soil surface.

The discussion continues as to whether the planting hole should be amended with organic matter or backfilled with the same soil that came out of the hole. Research conducted at the University of Florida indicates that amending the planting hole will not increase the overall survivability and vigor of the plant. The roots generally grow out away from the planting hole very quickly and away from the influence of amended soil in the planting hole.

Amending the planting hole probably will not cause problems, so it becomes a question of "is it worth the time and money" when research demonstrates it is not necessary. As a matter of fact, research data from one University trial indicated that the roots actually stayed in amended soil and did not move out into surrounding soil.

If you are planting a large bed of annuals or shrubs, then the opposite is recommended. Amend the entire area with composted material, Black Cow, etc. and mix into the soil 6-8 inches. Here, the roots have a large area to grow into and can make good use of the amendments.

It usually is a good idea to fill the planting hole with water. After the water drains from the planting hole, place the plant in the hole

with the top of the root ball even with the soil surface. Fill in around the root ball and water in to remove air bubbles. Lightly press down on the wet soil with your hands, but do not compress with your feet. Make a reservoir around the root ball which will hold 3-5 gallons of water. Water once per day for 2-3 weeks and then once every 2-3 days until the plant is established.

Do not put excess soil on top of the root ball. Soil is often left over after planting, so many gardeners think it is a good idea to place this extra soil on top of the root ball. This undesirable practice, called capping, may prevent the root ball from becoming wet which could eventually lead to the death of the plant. Over watering, under watering and capping are the most common reasons for landscape plant failure.

CITRUS

Many of you have been having trouble with citrus fruit splitting, particularly on Valencia, Hamlin, Navel oranges and Murcott (honey tangerine). Dancy tangerines, tangelos, and Temple oranges have a lower incidence of splitting. Fruit splitting is primarily a problem at high temperature, during periods of high humidity and rainfall from August through the fall. The exact cause is not known, but it is a problem of water relations and peel thickness. Low to deficient potassium levels resulting in thin peel promotes fruit splitting. Proper tree nutrition and a good water management program are the best defense against fruit splitting.



Make sure that you make three applications of fertilizer to mature trees per year. During periods of hot dry weather, particularly during April-May and October, give the trees additional water if they show signs of water

stress.

I have had a number of calls from homeowners complaining that their fruit was dry and pulpy, particularly on navel oranges. This probably can be attributed to the warm fall weather which has caused the fruit to ripen early. If the fruit is not picked when ripe, the tree starts to take the juice back into the tree leaving dry pulpy fruit.

FLOSS SILK TREE

Perhaps some of you have recently seen a large tree in bloom with pink flowers which look like hibiscus flowers. This is the floss silk tree. This rounded, deciduous tree has wide spreading branches which are green when young and covered with spines, often becoming grey and sometimes losing their coarse sharp spines. This is not a tree that you would want to climb. One of these trees is right behind The Barn on Main Street in Bartow.

The large, showy, pink and white, five petaled flowers are produced in small clusters in fall and winter (usually October) when the tree is nearly bare. The fruit are large, eight inch long, pear shaped, woody capsules, filled with silk, white, kapok-like floss and pea like seeds. Floss from the seeds was used for stuffing pillows and thin strips of the bare bark have been used to make rope.

Two grafted selections are available: 'Majestic Beauty' has rich pink flowers and 'Los Angeles Beautiful' has wine red flowers. The cultivar 'Monza' has a thornless trunk and pink fall flowers. The hardiness zone is 9b, so the tree could sustain cold damage in some parts of Polk County.

MISC. NOVEMBER GARDENING

Vegetables to be planted: beet, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrot, cauliflower, celery, collard, endive, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onion, pea, radicchio, radish, rhubarb, rutabaga, spinach, Swiss chard and turnip.

Radishes - Have you ever had a problem with radishes forming mostly stem and not much root? There are several reasons for this: 1) over fertilization with nitrogen or using organic matter with high nitrogen can cause excessive vegetative growth and reduced root, 2) manure seems to have some sort of hormonal effect on the radish which depresses root growth, and 3) high fall temperatures and heavy soil also seem to contribute to less root growth and more vegetative growth.

Flowers to plant - We are kind of running out of time for planting warm season annuals. Here are a few of my favorite cool season annuals which should do well when planted this time of year - calendula, carnation, foxglove, pansy, petunia, Shasta daisy and snapdragon.

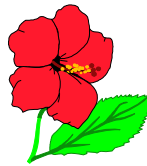
There are small, medium and large snapdragons on the market in most colors except blue. Selections that grow about 20 inches tall include Ribbon, Sonnet and La Bella mix. Shorter varieties, 8 to 10 inches tall, include Floral showers, Chimes hybrids, Tahiti hybrids.

Aulacaspis cycad scale - This scale insect continues to be a serious pest of sago palms in central Florida. The infestation is quickly spreading around Polk County, so examine the undersides of the fronds for this snow like infestation. Start spraying immediately with Organocide or some type of horticultural oil like Volck oil. Don't confuse this scale with the false magnolia scale which is usually found on the upper side of sago fronds. I am happy to tell you that a University of Florida

researcher has been assigned to work on this problem.

Hibiscus - I have had numerous calls concerning bud drop on hibiscus plants. This is often common on doubles. It can be caused by insects, nematodes, too much or too little fertilizer, and environmental conditions such as poor drainage, excessive water, and drought. The excessive bud drop we have experienced this year is probably related to environmental conditions.

Have a good gardening day,



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