Urban Horticulture Newsletter

February 2003

TURF

Herbicides - It is the time of the year to consider using a pre-emergence herbicide for control of annual grass weeds such as crabgrass in St. Augustine and Bahiagrass lawns. Pre-emergence herbicides only kill seeds when they are germinating, so you have to apply about the time of seed germination. If the chemical application is after weed emergence, the preemergence application is generally ineffective. A rule of thumb for central Florida make the first application around February 15 or when daytime temperatures reach 70 degrees F. for 4-5 consecutive days. The first application should be followed by a second application in about 9 weeks. Common pre-emergence herbicides for control of grassy weeds in St. Augustine and Bahiagrass include products such as pendimethalin and trifluralin.

It is generally a good idea to only apply the herbicide to the area that is infested. Herbicides can cause the grass to become stressed for a period of time after application, so there is no need to add an addition stress to the entire lawn for no reason. Therefore, we do not recommend weed and feed products that need to be applied to the whole lawn at one time. For best result from the fertilizer and the herbicide, they need to be applied at different times. Generally preemergence herbicides should be applied in mid-February while the first fertilizer application of the year should be made two weeks after turf green-up in March.

Fertilizer - Have a soil analysis done on the fertility of your lawn by the University of Florida Soil Testing Lab or some other lab. The University of Florida will conduct pH and determine amounts of calcium, phosphorous, magnesium and potassium in your soil for $7.00. If you contact the Extension Office, we will send you a kit for taking and sending your soil sample to the University of Florida Soils Lab. Most soils in central Florida have adequate amounts of phosphorous, but are often deficient in nitrogen, potassium and magnesium.

If the soil test shows that your sample has adequate amounts of phosphorous, then use a product like 15-0-15 which has 30-50% slow release nitrogen and potassium, but no phosphorous. If phosphorous is low, use a product such as 15-5-15 which has some phosphorous (middle number). There is no need to apply phosphorus to your lawn if there is adequate amounts already there. Unfortunately, many generic fertilizers on the market routinely have phosphorus as one of the ingredients.

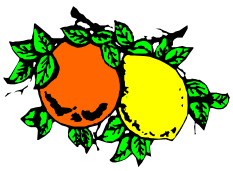
The general feeling now is that you should use a product that has the same amount of

nitrogen (first number) and potassium (last number). Ideally, both nitrogen and potassium should be slow release products, however these products may be hard to find. Read the fertilizer label.

If magnesium is low (this is sometimes expressed as a fourth number), then you have two options. If the pH is also low, then you can apply dolomite which contains magnesium and calcium, to correct the magnesium deficiency and raise pH at the same time. If your pH is at an acceptable level, then look for a fertilizer that has magnesium as one of its ingredients or apply magnesium alone. Do not use dolomite on your lawn or garden without having a pH test conducted first. Apply the fertilizer two weeks after spring green-up usually in March.

CITRUS

Dry fruit - I have been receiving calls since last fall concerning dry or granulated fruit, which is a drying of the juice vesicles. This happens to citrus fruit for various reasons. Some fruit, are more prone to have this problems than others such as, navels, tangerine hybrids, grapefruit and Valencias.



There are a number of possible explanations for this condition. The fruit may be over mature. In other words, you just left the fruit on the tree too long. This is complicated by warm, wet weather conditions which causes the fruit to mature ahead of schedule. So, the fruit ripens before being picked. When the fruit becomes over mature, the tree absorbs the juice which leaves the fruit dry. Dry fruit can also be caused by inadequate water or rainfall, but certainly not this last year.

I think the problem we are seeing this year with dry fruit is on trees being grown on lemon or other vigorous rootstocks. Adequate fertilizer combined with high rainfall through the growing season has encouraged these trees to grow vegetatively with limited fruit input.

Premature fruit drying is also a problem associated with young trees, a condition that tends to go away as the tree matures.

So, what can you do about dry fruit? Probably, if the tree is young it will eventually grow out of the condition. If the tree is on a less than desirable rootstock, then the fruit quality is always going to be questionable. If the tree is five years or older and never has produced decent fruit, then I would consider planting another tree.

Fruit splitting - We also received numerous calls concerning splitting fruit-mainly last fall. I think we can attribute much of that to the very wet fall weather. Some cultivars such as Valencia, Hamlin, Navel oranges and Murcotts have a higher risk of splitting than other citrus cultivars. The exact cause is unknown, but it is believed to be related to water variations and peel thickness. It may occur from water and nutritional stress during early fruit development. Low to deficient potassium levels results in thin peel which promotes fruit splitting. Proper tree nutrition and good water management are the best defense against fruit splitting.

Fertilizing - Older trees should already be fertilized. Fertilize young citrus trees (under 5 years old) in mid-March with a 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 citrus fertilizer. Start off fertilizing 1 year old trees every 4-6 weeks with ½ pound fertilizer spread evenly under the drip line of the tree. Two year old trees should receive 1.5 to 2.0 pounds of fertilizer 5 times per year, 3 year old trees should receive 2.0 to 4.0 pounds 4 times

per year, and 4 year old trees should receive 4-5 pounds of fertilizer 3 times per year.

The Extension Office has excellent literature on the care of citrus. Call and we would be happy to send you the information.

CRAPE MYRTLE

Crape myrtle generally requires little pruning. If pruning is necessary to improve shape or form, prune anytime after the leaves have fallen. Pruning anytime before that may encourage new growth which than could be killed by a frost or freeze. The plants are easy to prune while dormant since the branch structure is readily visible without foliage. Pruning while dormant also will not interfere with flower bud formation since crape myrtle flowers on new growth. Crape myrtles should not be pruned hard on an annual basis. Severe pruning can cause excessive vegetative growth, basal sprouting, and fewer, but larger, flowers. It also spoils the beautiful winter branch structure on crape myrtle trees.

Remove small spindly stems at the base of the trunks, thin plants from 3-7 main trunks, remove last seasons seed pods and make all pruning cuts back to a point on the stem up to one inch in diameter. After pruning apply a complete fertilizer, and add mulch under the drip line and water when necessary. However, crape myrtles are a hardy plant and can get by and minimal fertilizer and water. Crape myrtles, depending on the cultivar, flower from May until September.

Remember, when buying plants, to buy those that are hybrids, which are resistant to powdery mildew. However, all crape myrtles are susceptible to an aphid, which is specific to crape myrtles. These aphids can be easily controlled with soaps and oils. If left totally unchecked, can produce an abundance of honeydew upon which black sooty mold will grow.

FYN PROGRAM
by Anne Macloskey

Florida Yard Tip - Don't know where to start. Plant trees. The Florida Arbor Day has already passed (January 17), but the time is still right for planting trees. Re-establishing a tree canopy is a great way to begin your Florida Yard. Trees not only provide shade and wildlife habitat, but they also help reduce storm-water runoff. According to one estimate, a 50% tree canopy can reduce runoff by 25 percent. Trees also help remove pollutants from the air and replace carbon dioxide with purified oxygen. In addition, it is estimated that tree shade on the west side of a home can reduce air conditioning by 50 percent.

If those reasons don't suffice, consider that trees significantly increase the value of a home and lot. The related increase in resale value far outweighs the initial cost of the trees. Contact the Extension Office for information on tree selection, planting and care in central Florida.

MISC. FEBRUARY GARDENING

Vegetables to plant - beans, cantaloupe, corn, cucumber, eggplant, luffa, pepper, pumpkin, squash, tomato and watermelon.

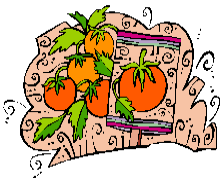
Flowers to plant - alyssum, baby's breath, begonia, candytuft, carnation, calendula, coneflower, coreopsis, cosmos, dahlia, delphinium, dianthus, dusty miller, false heather, four o'clock, gaillardia, geranium,

gerbera, godetia, Johnny-jump-up, licorice plant, lobelia, nasturtium, pansy, petunia, rose, salvia, snapdragon, Stokes aster, sweet pea, veronica and yarrow. You are just about out of time for petunia, pansies, snapdragon and carnations.

Herbs to plant - anise, basil, borage, chives, dill, fennel, lemon balm, mint, parsley, rosemary sage, sweet marjoram, tarragon and thyme.

New landscaping - Hardy trees and shrubs can be planted throughout February. Delay tender plantings until mid-March.

Container vegetable gardening - I see Home Depot has loads of tomato plants. Now is a good time to start these plants in containers. If we should get a late freeze, they can be brought inside. Use at least a five gallon bucket or similar container with holes punched in the bottom for drainage. Any moderately priced potting soil should work fine. I will say that products like Miracle-Gro potting soil is about ½ as heavy as products like Hyponex potting soil, which makes carrying the buckets inside much easier during cold weather.



I planted two plants in Miracle-Gro potting soil and two in Hyponex potting soil in early January. So far, all plants have comparable growth. To support the plants, I use a 3/8 inch reinforcing bar about 5-6 feet long wired to the top of the bucket. The joy of eating an excellent vine ripened tomato in February, in Florida makes all the care worth while. One other note, you will find that squirrels, mocking birds and rats also like good vine ripened tomatoes.

Pruning - The issue of pruning cold damaged plants comes up every year. As a rule of thumb, it is probably best to wait until the danger of freeze is over which is usually in March.

The reason for this is that you cannot tell in February how far the plant will continue to die back, so you may prune off more than is necessary. Also, the dead tissue may help protect tissue that is still alive from future freezes.

On the other hand, dead tissue can be pruned from damaged plants, but you must be prepared to fully protect these plants with freeze cloth or other coverings. At times, it may be easier to protect these smaller, pruned plants from future cold weather.

Have a good gardening day,

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