

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

May 2003

TURF

Chinch bugs - It's that time of the year again to be watching for chinch bugs in St. Augustinegrass. If you had an infestation last year keep an eye on the same spot, because they often can be found in the general area of old infestations. Also, check for them in stressed areas of the lawn such as along sidewalks and driveways. Use techniques that I have described before such as: 1) look for the pests with the naked eye 2) float the pests in a coffee can, or 3) soak the suspected area with soapy water.



If you find an infestation, probably the best chemical treatment on the market for control of chinch bugs is with a product called Talstar with the active ingredient bifenthrin at 0.2%. You must have a restricted pest control license to purchase this product, however Ortho now has a product on the market called Ortho Lawn Insect Killer Granules, which has the same active ingredient (bifenthrin), but at a reduced rate of 0.1 percent. The Ortho label states that it kills ants, fleas, ticks and other insects including chinch bugs and sod webworms in St. Augustinegrass and that it controls mole crickets in Bahiagrass. The rate of active ingredient per 1000 square feet of turf is the same for both products. The Ortho product is currently available at Lowes Retail Garden Center and probably is available at other

garden centers carrying Ortho products.

Please keep in mind that this type of product will kill most of the natural enemies of chinch bugs as well as other beneficial insects in your lawn including ground beetles, big eyed bugs and earwigs that prey on chinch bugs, so it is best to use the product only when absolutely necessary and only treat the infested area plus 10 feet.

Mole crickets - The most serious insect pest of bahiagrass is the mole cricket. These insects borrow through the soil and damage roots, causing rapid wilting of the grass. Check for mole crickets by looking for tunneling and mounds or by applying 2 gallons of water with 1-2 ounces of detergent soap. If present, the mole crickets will surface in a few minutes. As with chinch bugs, bifenthrin insecticide is probably the best chemical for control of mole crickets. However, there are baits available at retail garden centers which should also work.

In addition, there is a biological control alternative for mole crickets. A product called Nematac S, which utilizes the Steinernema scapterisci nematode, is available for the homeowner as of last year. The nematode attacks mole crickets and allows for the invasion of bacteria which eventually kills the pest. The most effective time to apply this product is in September through November

and March through May. The product is being packaged by Becker Underwood and costs about \$300 dollars. The cost of treatment is around \$65.00 per 1000 square feet of turf, so it is quite expensive. Results have varied from 30-90% control depending on location and other factors. However, once established in your lawn it could control mole crickets for several years.

Weed control - Atrazine is still the best general herbicide for control of broadleaf weeds in St. Augustinegrass. Atrazine is not recommended for treatment after April 15 due to possible damage to the grass and leaching problems with summer rains. Atrazine can be applied in the fall, particularly for dollar weed control, and in the late winter (mid-February) for control of various broadleaf weeds. Beware of any product with 2,4-D type ingredients for control of broadleaf weeds in St. Augustinegrass.



Apply postemergence herbicides, such as 2,4-D and dicamba (not Atrazine) on Bahiagrass in May for control of various broadleaf weeds, but be sure to make the applications early in the morning when the temperature is below 85 degrees.

MANAGE(TM) can be used for control of most species of nutsedge including Kyllinga in both St. Augustine and Bahiagrass lawns. IMAGE(TM) can also be used for control of nutsedge, but is limited in the number of nutsedge species it kills. MANAGE(TM) can be purchased at Lesco in Lakeland.

There still is not a reliable replacement product for ASULOX(TM) for postemergence control of crabgrass in warm season lawns. The only available herbicides for crabgrass control are still preemergence product (HALTS) that kill the germinating seed and need to be applied in

February before the seeds germinate. However, it seems that plain baking soda will kill crabgrass and will not damage or only slightly damage the St. Augustine and Bahiagrass lawn. To apply, liberally sprinkle the powder over the crabgrass infested area. I have tried it in my own St. Augustine lawn and it does seem to kill crabgrass, but there appears to be some damage to the St. Augustinegrass. I have not tried it on Bahiagrass.

There is a home remedy product available locally called AgraLawn Crabgrass Control, which the label states can be used on St. Augustine and Bahiagrass, for spot treatment control of hairy and smooth crabgrass, basketgrass, chickweed, clover and other similar weeds. It is claimed to be less phytotoxic to the grass than straight baking soda. This product contains cinnamon, corn and wheat flour, sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and a few other ingredients.

I am in the process of trying the AgraLawn product for control of crabgrass and basketgrass. Early results indicate that it may control some species of crabgrass, basketgrass and Florida pusley. I will keep you updated on long term effects on weed growth and soil pH. If you care to try the AgraLawn commercial product, it is available at Doty's Garden Center in Winter Haven, Peterson's Nursery and Crowder Bros. Hardware in Lakeland.

CITRUS

Citrus - Most cultivars of citrus are subject to greasy spot infection. This is a fungus which infects citrus trees in the summer months and manifests itself as greasy looking spots on the leaves. This fungus causes the leaves to drop in the winter and spring of the next year. Make an application of copper fungicide at the end of May or the beginning of June. This should protect the tree

throughout the remainder of the year.

Fertilizer - May is the time to make the second application of fertilizer to citrus trees. Apply one pound of 6-6-6 citrus fertilizer per year of age of the tree up to 8 years old. In other words a 5 year old tree would receive 5 pounds of fertilizer spread even under the drip line of the tree, and if possible, a few feet beyond the drip line. If the tree is looking deficient, then an application of micro-nutrients would be a good idea.

The optimum pH for nutrient uptake is 6.5 so you may want to have a pH test done on your soil. Very low or very high pH can have a major impact on nutrient uptake. The nutrients may be in the soil, but the plant simply cannot absorb them because the nutrients are not soluble in water at a very high or very low pH.

Insects - Watch the trees for sucking insects such as aphids, scales, mealybugs and white flies. A sure sign of an infestation of sucking insects is black sooty mold on the leaves and fruit. As with many landscape plants, these sucking insects can be controlled with soaps (aphids and whiteflies) and horticultural oils (scales and mealybugs). Soaps and oils will have the least impact on beneficial insects such as ladybugs, green lacewings, syrphid flies and many others.

INSECTICIDAL SOAPS AND OILS

Insecticidal Soaps - Just a word about soaps and oils used for insect control in your landscape. Be careful when you use regular dish soap mixed with water (one tablespoon dish soap to one gallon water) that you use a mild product such as Ivory soap, because you may damage your plants. Remember, these products are designed to remove grease from your dishes. The safest thing to do is to buy the commercial insecticidal soaps like Safer Soap.

Also, a dish soap and vegetable oil mix can be damaging to some plants. In addition, the vegetable oil is not emulsified so it will not mix with water and has to be constantly agitated.

Horticultural oils - Using horticultural oil is an environmentally friendly way to control insect pests in your landscape. It does have some impact on beneficial insects, but not as much as products like malathion. I often recommend oils to clients for control of insect pests and I'm often asked "What kind of oil or product should I use"?

There are two types of horticultural oil products on the local market-petroleum based products and paraffin based products. Volck is an Ortho product which has petroleum base and the other is Ultra-fine which is a paraffin based oil. The paraffin base horticultural oils are safer to use on actively growing plants in the summer time, but are more expensive than petroleum base oils. Both products are locally available at retail garden centers.

MICRO-IRRIGATION: AN EASY ALTERNATIVE

by Anne Yasalonis-Florida
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As you plant your new spring plantings, it is important to think about how they will be irrigated. There are many options when choosing irrigation equipment, but only a few are recommended for water conservation. Micro-irrigation is inexpensive and easy to install and has numerous advantages.

Saving water by reducing evaporation is one of the most important advantages of using micro-irrigation. Evaporation is decreased by placing the water where it will do the most good-close to the ground and directly on the

plant root system. Another advantage is smaller flow rates which require less energy to run than high pressure systems. Also, the output is slow so that the water has time to soak into the ground and will not run-off in a hilly terrain. In addition to saving water, a properly maintained micro-irrigation system will help you save on costly water bills. If you are interested in learning more about the advantages of micro-irrigation, contact the Polk County Extension Service to obtain a schedule of micro-irrigation workshops.

For other tips on saving water go to <http://www.watmatters.org> or contact the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program at the Extension Office.

MISC. MAY GARDENING

Vegetables to plant - Calabaza, chayote, cherry tomatoes, dasheen, malanga, okra, pepper, Southern pea, sweet potatoes, tamarillo, yam and yard long bean.

Flowers to plant - Angelonia, balsam, begonias, black-eyed Susan, blue daze, browallia, bush daisy, butterfly weed, cat's whiskers, celosia, coleus, coreopsis, crossandra, Dahlberg daisy, gaillardia, gazania, gerbera, goldenrod, gomphrena, impatiens, lantana, liatris, marigolds, melampodium, moon vine, nicotiana, nierembergia, pentas, Porter weed, portulaca, purslane, salvia, sunflowers, torenia, verbena and zinnias.

Herbs to plant - Anise, basil, bay laurel, cardamom, chives, coriander, dill, lemon balm, oregano, sage, savory, sweet marjoram, mint, tarragon and thyme.

Citrus flatid planthopper - This is a sucking insect that you may be seeing on your citrus trees as well as many other landscape plants.

The presence of the insect is readily seen mainly on the stems as a 2-3 inch long white, cottony covering of the stem. At first it looks like mealybugs, but if you disturb the cottony material, you will find a whitish planthopper which rapidly jumps off the stem. I don't think this insect does a lot of damage to the plant, but the white cottony material on the upper stems of ornamental plants is quite unsightly.

Azalea cuttings - If the stems of this year's growth are turning from green to brown, you can take 3-4 inch tip cuttings. Under mist propagation, they should root in 12-15 weeks. However, I have successfully rooted many azalea cuttings by placing them in potting soil in the shade under an oak tree and watering 1-2 times per day. Be sure to use rooting hormone on the cuttings.



Poinsettias - Don't let your poinsettias get too leggy. New growth after four weeks or when it is 12 inches long, should be cut back leaving four leaves on each shoot. This procedure should be repeated every time new growth develops until after September 10.

Have a good gardening day,

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