

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

September 2003

TURF

Fertilization - September is the recommended time to make the last application of a complete fertilizer such as 15-5-15 with 30-50% slow release nitrogen. Select a fertilizer that has equal amounts of nitrogen (N) and potassium (K). Remember the first number stands for nitrogen, the second phosphorous and the third potassium and these numbers collectively represent the percent of the nutrient present in the bag (15% nitrogen or 15 pounds of nitrogen in a 100 pound bag). Have your soil tested by the University of Florida for phosphorous and if you have an adequate amount in your soil use a product with no phosphorous such as a 15-0-15 or one with low phosphorous (under 4%).

Calculate the square footage of your lawn (multiply length times width). You should be applying either $\frac{1}{2}$ pound nitrogen per 1000 square feet, if the fertilizer does not have slow release nitrogen or 1 pound if the fertilizer has slow release nitrogen like sulfur coated urea (check the label). To determine the amount of fertilizer to be applied per 1000 square feet divide 100 by the percent nitrogen. You would apply a 15% nitrogen product at a rate of 6.7 pounds per 1000 square feet.

Weed and feed fertilizers - My suggestion would be not to use weed and feed fertilizers. Often, the time to fertilize is not the time to apply herbicides. Generally, weed infestations are localized so there is no need to apply herbicide mixed with fertilizer to the whole

lawn. Just spray the part of the lawn that has the weeds. Herbicides put stress on the lawn, particularly if the application is not at the right time and amount and may do more harm than good.

Herbicides - Do not apply products such as Atrazine or Banvel under the drip line of trees or close to shrubs. Atrazine is a common herbicide used on St. Augustinegrass and Banvel is used on Bahiagrass. These products leach into the soil and are picked up by the roots of shrubs and trees and may cause severe damage, particularly if the product is accidentally applied at higher than recommended rates. Remember, the roots of trees may grow out away from the tree trunk three times the diameter of the drip line.

TREES

Retaining trees in the landscape is very important to the homeowner for numerous reasons. Trees improve the quality of the landscape, they reduce electrical bills, they give off oxygen, they absorb particulate matter (50 lbs. per year - dust), they absorb carbon dioxide, they can protect cold sensitive plants in the landscape during winter and they increase property values just to name a few benefits.

We receive many calls from homeowners concerning the health of their landscape trees. There are a number of reasons why many oak trees, as well as other trees in Polk County die, such as from lightning strikes, flooding,

drought, herbicide injury, insects, diseases and probably the worst one - construction. Improper pruning can also lead to serious tree problems over a period of years.

Lightning strikes - As you know, we do have hundreds of lightning strikes in Polk County every summer and sometimes trees are struck. The damage can be very obvious with long splits in the bark exposing the inner wood and there also may be burn marks on the tree. The trees tend to die very quickly and the dead leaves usually remain on the branches for a short period of time after the lightning strike.

Water Issues - Flooding and drought lead to the death of many trees. Right now many trees in Polk County are in areas with high water tables, so the roots are in soil saturated with water which makes the tree more vulnerable to diseases and less able absorb oxygen in the soil. Next year we could find ourselves back in a drought situation again and the tree roots would not have enough water. Drought can cause the inner wood to shrink and pull away from the outer bark which may leave a split, similar to a split from a lightning strike. This cycle of too much water and too little water can be very stressful to the tree and lead to the tree's decline and death over a period of years.

Construction - In a developing area like Florida, construction can be a leading killer of trees. Many homeowners and contractors do not realize the damage that can be caused to trees by ditching within the drip line for utilities, driving across the drip line with heavy equipment (just walking can compact the soil), storing soil under the drip line which causes compaction, making grade changes of more than a few inches, and spilling chemicals and paints to name just a few construction activities affecting trees.

I receive a number of calls from residents

living in homes 4-5 years old that cannot understand why the large oak in their front yard suddenly died. The tree most likely was injured during the construction of the house and it took five years for it to die.

Insect and diseases - Insect infestations do impact the health of trees, but usually the tree is already stressed before the tree is attacked. Most insects do not attack healthy trees with the exception of the Southern Pine beetle which does not occur in Polk County, so far. Two common diseases of ornamental trees, slime flux and Hypoxylon canker, also usually infect trees that are already weakened.

What can we do? - The single most important thing that can be done to save a tree in a construction area is to determine what tree(s) are to be saved and then construct a tree protection zone around each tree with a substantial fence just outside the drip line. Nothing is allowed inside of that fence during the construction phase. In many cases, just protecting the root zone will save the tree from a slow death 5-10 years later. If you are constructing a new house or having construction on an old house i.e. swimming pools, sidewalks, room additions, new utilities, etc. make sure the contractor is aware of tree saving methods before construction begins and that he is legally responsible for following these procedures.

STORMWATER RUNOFF SOLUTIONS

by Anne Yasalonis,

Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program
Coordinator

With all of the recent rains, you may have noticed the stormwater rushing down driveways, sidewalks and streets. Although you may not think twice about that water, there are many harmful ingredients that are traveling into our waterways via stormwater. Pollutants such as pesticides, fertilizers, pet

waste, grass clippings and automotive fluids can all travel in our stormwater. There are many easy habits you can adopt in your home to do your part against non-point source pollution.

Wash your car on the lawn or other unpaved surface to minimize runoff. Check any vehicles for oil leaks and clean with kitty litter or sand. Don't rinse into stormwater drains! Please properly dispose of the material. Use pesticides and fertilizers sparingly. If the forecast calls for rain, wait and apply at a later date. Sweep yard debris such as grass clippings, fertilizer and soil back into the yard. Remove trash from street gutters. Direct down spouts and gutters onto your lawn or plant beds. Use porous paving materials such as brick, flagstone, gravel or mulch. Pick up after your pets. Collect and reuse stormwater in a rain barrel or cistern. Your plants will thank you!

To obtain more information on stormwater runoff and what you can do to preserve our lakes and waterways, please contact the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods program.

MISC. SEPTEMBER GARDENING

Vegetable gardening - Your fall vegetable garden should be tilled and ready to go. September planting include lima beans, snap beans, corn, cucumber, eggplant, pepper, southern pea, rhubarb, squash and tomato. As the end of the month approaches plant broccoli, cabbage, celery, collard, endive, lettuce, mustard, onion, radish, strawberry and turnip.

Herbs to be planted - Anise, basil, bay laurel, borage, chives, coriander, dill, lemon balm, lavender, Mexican tarragon, mint, parsley, rosemary, sage, sweet fennel, sweet marjoram and thyme.

Flowers to be planted - Ageratum, angelonia, begonia, blue daze, butterfly weed, cat's whiskers, celosia, cleome, coleus, coreopsis, cosmos, garden mums, gaura, gazania, gerbera, goldenrod, gomphrena, heliotrope, impatiens, jacobinia, lantana, marigold, melampodium, nicotiana, pentas, periwinkle, ruellia, salvia, sunflower, sweet alyssum, torenia, verbena and zinnia.

Mulch - I'm happy to inform you that melaleuca mulch is now available in Polk County at Johnson's Landscape Service. They are located on the southwest side of the intersection of State Highway 17 and County Road 640 in Homeland about 5 miles south of Bartow. Their telephone number is (863) 581-4889.

Citrus - Make your last application of fertilizer at the end of September or the first of October. Use a 6-6-6 or 8-8-8 citrus fertilizer at a rate of 1 pound for each year of age up until 8 years old. In other words a 6 year old tree would receive 6 pounds while a 10 year old tree would receive 8 pounds. Spread the fertilizer evenly under the drip of the tree and possibly outside the drip line a few feet.

Citrus leaf miner - This is one of the most common pests on citrus trees and one that creates the most questions. The adult is a tiny little moth that lays its eggs on the leaf surface. The egg hatches and the caterpillar bores into the leaf and feeds between the upper and lower leaf surface leaving a trail across the leaf that often look like the trail of a snail. The leaves become distorted and look terrible, however they usually stay on the tree and continue to photosynthesize. This pest is usually not a serious problem, unless the tree is very young. About the only thing that can be done is to spray each new flush of growth every week for about 3-4 weeks with a horticultural oil such as Ultrafine.

Poinsettias - Do not do any more pruning after September 10, because it may interfere with flowering. Poinsettias usually set buds soon after October 10.

Shrubs - September is time to make the final application of fertilizer to your landscape shrubs. Use a complete fertilizer with a ratio of approximately 3:1:2, 3:1:3 (12-4-8 or 15-5-15) with micro-nutrients. The Lesco product with an analysis of 12-2-14 (N-P-K) with 4.25% slow release nitrogen and potassium, 4.5% magnesium and 2.5% manganese is a good choice. A 6-6-6 fertilizer can be used, however if your soil has adequate phosphorous (most soils in Polk County have adequate phosphorous), then the phosphorous is wasted and may run off into our waterways.

Have your soil tested by the University of Florida Soils Lab for phosphorous content. If you call the Extension Office, we will send you a kit with a sample bag and box along with soil sampling instructions. The University will test your soil for pH plus percentage of phosphorous, magnesium, calcium and potassium for \$7.00.

The Master Gardeners here at the Extension Office will test your soil for pH for a \$3.00 fee. These tests are conducted every Thursday.

Bird baths - If you have bird baths in your landscape, make sure that you keep them clean. A number of avian diseases can be found in unclean bird baths.

Irrigation system - As we approach fall and dryer weather in winter months, September is a good month to check out the irrigation system. Learn how to run the controller, so you can operate it manually. Calibrate the system, so you know how much water you are applying. Check for broken sprinkler head or lines. Make adjustments to sprinkler heads

where necessary (don't irrigate the road). Water is becoming expensive and promises to become more expensive, so it is going to pay you to use it efficiently.

Have a good gardening day,

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