

POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

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Dear Reader: I hope this newsletter finds everyone well after three devastating hurricanes in Polk County. I didn't have any trees blow down in my yard (just lucky), but I lost power for a week - an experience I don't want to repeat. On the bright side, the Master Gardener Calendar for 2005 is about ready. I will enclose order forms in the November Newsletter, so be thinking about ordering one as a Christmas present for one of your gardening friends or just one for yourself. Also, we still have about 2 pallets of melaleuca mulch for sale, which we would like to sell in the next couple of months. We will order another load in March.

HURRICANE DAMAGED TREES

I think that hurricanes Charley, Frances and Jeanne have given us a new perspective on large trees in our landscape. Most of the damage was caused by older, weakened, large trees falling on houses, cars and on utility lines.

Laurel oaks have a life span of only about 60 years, so when they approach 50 years old, they often have rotten areas in the large limbs and trunk. Many of these trees were planted around Polk County in the 1940's and 50's, particularly in the Winter Haven area. These older laurel oaks did not stand a chance when winds hit them with

hurricane force. Chinese elms, which are normally shallow rooted, along with large trees planted in soils with a high water table, which encourages shallow root growth, were also very susceptible to damage from high winds.

I don't have specific information for Polk County, but Mr. Tom MacCubbin, at the Orange County Extension Office, reported that the trees most severely affected by Hurricane Charley were Chinese elms (var. Drake), hickories (poorly potted and older), laurel oaks (40-50 years old), pines (variable damage), older red cedar, red maples, Tabebuias and weeping willows.

Conversely, large trees over 35 feet that survived well were bald cypress, live oaks, sycamores (some damage), and sweet gums (some damage). Medium trees 25-35 feet that survived well were hollies, river birch, sand live oak and winged elm. Small trees under 25 feet that survived well were ligustrums and red buds. Most palms survived well, however Queen palms did sustain some bud breakage.



Now is the time to start thinking about replacement trees. We may want to think about replacing those large oaks with smaller trees. Mr. MacCubbin suggests that if you want

a large tree, live oaks and bald cypress may be good choices. Sycamores and sweet gums did sustain some damage but may also be good choices for your landscape. Good choices in the 20-35 foot range include crape myrtle, hollies, red bud, sand live oak, tree ligustrums and winged elms. Keep the plantings 25 feet away from your house, side walks, driveways and utility lines.

TURF

Fertilizer - Now is the time to make the last fertilizer application of the year. Use a fertilizer that has relatively large amounts of nitrogen and potassium such as 15-0-15, 15-5-15 and has 30-50% slow release nitrogen. You could even use a fertilizer with higher potassium than nitrogen such as a 9-2-24. To determine the amount of fertilizer to use, divide 100 by the percent nitrogen in the bag. With a 15-5-15 fertilizer, you would apply 6.7 pounds of fertilizer to 1000 square feet of turf.



To determine the square footage of your lawn multiply the length by the width. Divide this number by 1000 which gives you the footage in thousand square feet. Multiply this figure by the number of pounds you want to apply per thousand square feet of your turf area. Or, use a spreader recommended on the fertilizer bag. Don't guess, you could use 2-3 times too much or too low. If the rate is too low, then you won't get the desired affect. If the rate of application is too high, then you may burn the grass and/or the excess could leach in to the aquifer or run off into creeks and lakes.

Take the time to determine the number of square feet in your lawn. You only have to do it one time, unless you change the size of your turf area.

Weed control - You may be tempted to apply a weed and feed product to your St. Augustine or Bahiagrass lawn for fertility and weed control.

However, as I mentioned above, I would encourage you to use a high potassium fertilizer (15-5-15) by itself and then spot treat the weeds with atrazine in St. Augustinegrass and 2,4-D type products in Bahiagrass. There are two good reasons for not using weed and feed products: 1) You have to treat your whole lawn and your lawn may have areas that are not infested with weeds, and 2) the weed and feed products are typically low in potassium and high in nitrogen. A common weed and feed product found at most retail garden centers has 29% nitrogen, 3% phosphorous and 4% potassium with 1.055% atrazine. The University Specialists tell us that high potassium fertilizers should be used, particularly in the fall, as they build strong roots which makes the grass more cold and drought tolerant.



The weed situation may be such that it would be better to spot treat weeds with a non-selective herbicide, such as Round-up or Reward. Round-up is a systemic herbicide which is taken into the leaves and down into the roots. It usually takes 1-2 weeks for the weed to be killed. On the other hand Reward (diquat) is a desiccant which kills the leaf tissue it hits, but is not systemically taken into the whole plant. It kills the leaves very quickly (hours) but usually does not kill the roots so there may be regrowth.

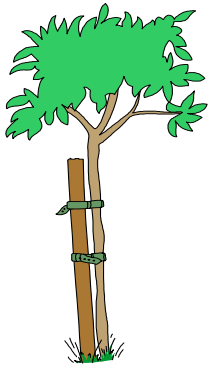
In any case, either of these products will kill or damage the grass it hits, so you may have to re-sod or re-plant the treated area. Sometimes the weeds in a turf area can be carefully sprayed or wiped so little or no grass is affected. Keep in mind when using Round-up that it can move along St. Augustinegrass stolons, so you may see damage a foot or two away from the treated area. So be careful when using Round-up along a fence line which is over-grown with St. Augustinegrass - Reward would probably be a better choice in this situation.

Insect and disease control - There are still chinch bugs out there in lawns. Be watching for declining areas, particularly along driveways and sidewalks or in areas where you may have previously had chinch bugs.

Due to all the recent heavy rains, disease can be a problem. If you are seeing dying patches in your St. Augustinegrass, and you have eliminated chinch bugs, then the problem may be a disease. The problem could be brown patch which is a spring and fall disease. The leaf blades turn yellow as the sheath rots. The leaf blade can easily be pulled from the sheath. Two applications of Immunox two weeks apart seems to control this problem.

CITRUS

Righting blown over trees - I have received many calls from homeowners who want to know if citrus trees can be salvaged after they have been blown over by high winds. Citrus trees are quite tough and can be saved some of the time. You probably will be most successful with trees that have trunks less than 4 inches in diameter.



When trees are blown over, the roots are usually pulled out of the ground leaving a lot of the soil behind. The first step in righting a tree is to remove some of the soil from the hole so that the root mass can be placed back in the ground. To accomplish this you may also have to prune back some of the longer roots. Pull the tree back in place and secure it with guy lines, 2x4's, etc. - the roots should be below the soil surface. Be careful not to scar the trunk in the process (don't use a chain) and also be careful not to hurt yourself.

Next, fill in around the roots with soil and water, being careful not to leave any air pockets.

Because some of the root mass has lost its capacity to absorb water and nutrients, you will

need to prune off some of the foliage. This depends on how much of the root mass has been damaged, but a rule of thumb may be about 50%. Pruning off this much foliage often exposes the inner portion of the tree to sunlight which can cause sun-scalding of the limbs and trunk. You can prevent sun-scalding by painting the exposed area with a white latex paint.

Fertilizer - Now is the time to make that last application of fertilizer to your citrus trees. Generally, apply one pound of a 6-6-6 citrus fertilizer per year of growth under the drip line of the tree. In other words a five year old tree would get 5 pounds of fertilizer and an 10 year old tree would get 8 pounds. Keep the fertilizer 6-8 inches from the trunk. If you use a citrus fertilizer with higher nitrogen than 6-6-6, you will need to reduce the amount of fertilizer accordingly.

Mature citrus trees (5 years or older) should receive 3 applications per year - January, May and October. Trees younger than 5 years should receive multiple applications of fertilizer starting in March. For instance, a newly planted citrus tree should receive a small amount of fertilizer ($\frac{1}{2}$ pound) every 4-6 weeks. The reason for this is that you do not want to stimulate growth on a young tree during a period when there may be a frost or freeze. Check our citrus fertilizer guide for specific recommendations.



Navel oranges - Every year I receive numerous calls from homeowners concerning dry fruit on navel orange trees - called granulation. There are numerous reasons for this: 1) the tree may just be too young to produce good fruit, 2) there may have been a very warm and dry late summer and fall - not this year, 3) the fruit may have been picked too late - start checking the fruit now for quality as navel oranges do not have to be orange to be ripe, and 4) the tree may have been grafted on an overly vigorous root stock such as lemon -

the tree roots puts it's energy into producing foliage not fruit. The trees grafted on overly vigorous root stocks may never produce acceptable fruit.

Another problem with navel oranges is fall fruit drop. This seems to occur when fall weather is hot and rainy. Fruit drop can be aggravated by low potassium levels in heavy crop load years. Navel oranges are a wonderful fruit tree, but you may want to give consideration to other early cultivars such as Hamlin.

MISC. OCTOBER GARDENING

Planting trees and shrubs - Trees and shrubs should be planted in the fall and winter months, instead of waiting until spring. The plants are dormant during this time and less apt to be injured by shock from planting. Also, the weather and moisture during this time are ideal for plant establishment as well as good working weather for the gardener.

Planting in the fall and winter allows the plants time to become established prior to spring growth and bloom, and prior to summer heat. Research shows that roots of a plant continue to grow and develop during the winter, even though the above ground part of the plant remains dormant.



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

Herbs to plant - Anise, basil, bay laurel, borage, cardamom, chervil, coriander, dill, fennel, garlic,

lavender, lemon balm, lovage, mint, nasturtium, oregano, rosemary sage, sweet marjoram, tarragon, thyme and water cress.

Flowers to plant - African daisy, alyssum, angelonia, begonia, black eyed Susan, blue daze, calendula, candytuft, celosia, chrysanthemums, cleome, coleus, cornflower, cosmos, dianthus, dusty miller, gaillardia, geraniums, gerbera, heliotrope, hollyhock, impatiens, larkspur, lobelia, nicotiana, pentas, salvia, snapdragon, sunflower, sweet pea, verbena and zinnia.



Roses - After all of this rainy weather, many rose plants are looking awful. I'm seeing heavy infestations of black spot on roses that normally are quite tolerant. At this time, they need a little face-lift. Trim out the dead stems that have grown this summer. Remove old flower heads and rose hips. Trim out the smaller shoots at the base of the plant. Reduce the overall height of the plants by cutting flowers back a foot or more. Add mulch and fertilize monthly. Also treat for insects and disease as necessary.

Have a good gardening day,

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<http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu>