POLK COUNTY URBAN HORTICULTURER NEWSLETTER

October 2006 **Vol. 6 No. 4**

TURF

Fertilizer - If you didn't fertilizer your lawn in September, you should make your final fertilizer application of the year during October to both St. Augustine lawns and Bahiagrass lawns. As I often say, use a complete fertilizer (Nitrogen-Phosphorous-Potassium) such as 15-5-15 (2% iron), 15-0-15 (2% iron), 9-2-24 (6% iron) or 12-2-14 (4.5% iron), or you can still use the old stand-by 16-4-8.

Remember to use one pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet of turf if you are using a slow release nitrogen product and ½ pound nitrogen if you are using a fast release nitrogen. To determine the amount of fertilizer in the bag which equals one pound of nitrogen, divide 100 by the percent nitrogen. In other words if the product contained 15 percent nitrogen (15-5-15), you would divide 100 by 15 which equals 6.7 pounds. So you would apply 6.7 pounds of that product per 1000 square feet. University researchers calculate that any more than one pound will lead to excessive fertilizer leaching and runoff pollution

The fall is a critical time to add additional potassium which promotes strong root growth, so it's better to use at least as much potassium as nitrogen. Also, look at that label If you or your lawn spray companies are using this type of product, be watching for signs that the chinch bugs are still alive. There isn't a good replacement and many of the

to see how much of the nitrogen is in a water insoluble (slow release) form. The Lesco 9-2-24 has both slow release nitrogen and potassium. A high potassium fertilizer like this one may be a more desirable product to use in the fall. Calculate the amount of product used based on the percent potassium and not nitrogen, so you would be dividing 100 by 24 and applying that amount (4.2 pounds) per 1000 square feet.

Insects - Continue to watch for chinch bugs in St. Augustine lawns. I have received many calls from homeowners who think they have a disease in their lawn, when actually they have a combination of disease and chinch bugs or just chinch bugs.

We have enjoyed several years of good chinch bug control with products such as Talstar and Ortho Max. Both of these products are in the family of insecticides called synthetic pyrethroids and both contain the active ingredient bifenthrin. One is for commercial use and the other is for homeowner use, but the products are basically the same. Unfortunately, we are finding many cases of chinch bug resistance to this product and other products in the same family like permethrin.

lawn spray companies are going back to old products like Sevin, which is also available to homeowners. Orthene has been taken off the market and can no longer be used for chinch bug control on residential lawns.

Weed control - You may be seeing quite a few weeds in your St. Augustine and Bahiagrass lawns. Some of the more difficult to control weeds, like creeping beggar weed, probably should be pulled out or sprayed with a non-selective herbicide such as Roundup, Finale or Reward. The dead areas can then be plugged or resodded. If you are careful, you may only hit the weeds.

Diquat is sold under the trade name Reward and has a desiccant action, rather than systemic activity like Roundup and Finale. A desiccant removes the moisture from the green tissue causing the tissue to die, however the plant may grow back from the roots.

There are weed and feed materials available which have fertilizer and herbicide mixed together. There are those with 2,4-D for Bahiagrass and those with Atrazine for St. Augustine lawns. The University discourages homeowners from using "Weed and Feed" products. It is best to apply only herbicides to the weed infested areas of your lawn.

HOLIDAY PLANTS

October is a critical month for holiday plants such as Christmas cactus, poinsettias and kalanchoes. Around mid-October the days become short enough to trigger the flowering process. At this point in the fall, these holiday plants should receive no nighttime light and they should not receive any pruning because developing flower buds may be not losing all their leaves in the fall, are also undergoing changes although you may not see removed.

Many gardeners have holiday cactus that have been in the family for many years. Some have been traded from friend to friend or have been passed down from generation to generation. They are called Thanksgiving cactus if they bloom during Thanksgiving and Christmas cactus when they bloom in December.

Your Christmas cactus plants should be developing small greenish swelling buds at the end of the stems. They are small and bead-like at first, but quickly enlarge and become pointed as they develop color. If you don't see buds by early November, your holiday cactus may be getting nighttime light.

Care for your holiday plants by watering when the soil surface is dry to the touch. Fertilize Christmas cactus monthly with a soluble fertilizer, such as Miracle-Gro, from March through September. Fertilize pot grown poinsettias and kalanchoes every other week. Do not fertilize the plants during the fall and winter months. Keep poinsettias in the full sun. Kalanchoes and Christmas cactus should be kept in light shade. Keep the blooming plants away from heat sources and breezes which will dry out the flowers. Pick off declining blooms as needed.

PLANTS PREPARE FOR WINTER

When there is a change in the season, there are also changes in plants. In the fall deciduous plants lose their leaves and become dormant for winter. Evergreen plants, those

signs of these changes.

Azaleas may lose a few leaves now. These are the older leaves on the stem near the center of the plant. They turn reddish and drop from the plant. Don't be alarmed by the loss of a few older azalea leaves from now until spring. However, if the younger leaves, those nearest the tip of the shoot, turn yellow or brown there is cause for concern. Poor drainage, lack of water or alkaline soils may cause this condition.

Be sure to keep azaleas and other ornamental plants well watered during dry weather that may occur from now until spring. Generally, azalea leaves will wilt indicating they need water. However, other ornamental plants don't show wilt symptoms when dry, so it becomes much more difficult to decide when to water these plants. They may exhibit drought symptoms by leaf drop and browning of the leaf margins and leaf tips. To avoid leaf drop and browning, you will need to develop a feel for just when these plants need water. Many people over-water just to make sure.

Currently the University of Florida is working on economical in-ground moisture sensors which will automatically turn on the irrigation when the soil is at a specific moisture level. These sensors can be strategically placed at various irrigation zones throughout the landscape. This technology should help save water and keep plants healthy.

Yellow leaves are showing up on camellias, cherry laurel and sweet olive. Again, as with azaleas, these are older leaves on the stem near the middle of the plant. It is normal for these leaves to drop from the plants from now until spring.

Do not confuse scale damage on camellias for normal aging of leaves. Scale insects feed on the lower surface of camellia leaves causing them to become splotched with yellow.
reduced growth rate, grasses cannot produce enough new leaves to replace the leaves that

The leaves of sycamore trees have changed from green to brown. Although this phenomenon occurs every year, it is not caused by a change in day length or temperature and is therefore not considered a true seasonal change. The change in color is the result of sycamore lace bug feeding on the leaves. By the time the damage is visible, there is little that can be done to correct the problem. However, this problem will take care of itself since sycamore trees will soon be dropping their leaves.

Although Florida is not known for exciting fall color, there are enough temperate plants to provide some fall color. Many of the pigments that contribute to the bright colors of autumn are present in the leaves from the time they unfold in the spring. During spring and summer the green pigment (chlorophyll) dominates the other pigments and is the major visible color for vigorously growing plants. In the fall, the production of new chlorophyll slows and is finally depleted allowing the other pigments to become more evident.

The orange, red, yellow and brown colored leaves are expressions of the carotenoid pigments. The red, blue and purple anthocyanin pigments are responsible for the red and purple color of dogwoods, sweet gum, red maple, Bradford pear, Loblolly bay and crape myrtles.

Lawngrasses also experience some seasonal changes. Much to the delight of most of us, the growth rate of lawngrasses decreases in the fall. Although this slow growth means less mowing is required, it also means that lawns will not be as attractive as they were during the spring and summer. Because of the are dying naturally or being damaged by foot traffic. Bermudagrass and Centipedegrass will

turn brown with the arrival of the first frost. St. Augustinegrass will turn purplish as a result of cool temperatures and light frost. With freezing temperatures, St. Augustinegrass will turn brown in unprotected areas.

MISC. OCTOBER GARDENING

Citrus - Make your final application of a complete fertilizer for the year.

I have received a number of calls concerning fruit drop. This is normal during variable weather. We actually have three major times when fruit drops from citrus. One is immediately after flowering, then there is a June fruit drop and one during the fall. It's the trees way of regulating what it can hold. .
Shrubs - Fertilize all shrubs with a complete fertilizer. However, keep in mind fertilizer will encourage additional growth.

Vegetables to plant - beets, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, collards, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard, onions, peas, potatoes, radicchio, radishes, rhubarb, roquette, rutabaga, spinach, strawberries, Swiss chard, and turnips.

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

Soil Testing - Have your soil checked for pH. The Master Gardeners will conduct this test for you for a $3.00 fee. Bring in or send your soil sample any time before Thursday morning. These tests are conducted every Thursday morning and the results, with any recommendations, will be mailed to you. You also have the option of sending your soil to the University of Florida Soils Laboratory. They will check pH for $3.00 and soil nutrients for $4.00. If you want to send your sample to the University of Florida, call for a soil test kit and we will mail you one (863-519-8677).

Cold damage to susceptible plants - We are not very many weeks away from the time when temperatures will dip into the 50's. You need to be aware that plants such as pothos, aglaonema, episcia, heliconia, peperomia and dieffenbachia can be damaged when temperatures hit the low 50's, particularly episcia. Temperatures in the 40's may kill these plants. Be thinking about a place to put these plants when they need to be brought inside.

Master Gardener Calendars - The Master Gardeners are about to publish their Master Gardener Calendar for 2007. I have included an order form along with this newsletter.

Have a good gardening day,

David Shibles
Environmental Horticulturist
Polk County Extension Service
P.O. Box 9005, Drawer HS03
Bartow, FL 33831

For gardening information:
http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu

Polk County Web Site
http://polk.ifas.ufl.edu