

# Gardening/Horticulture

## Newsletter

September 2005

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### LAWN WEED CONTROL

Most of the weeds that infest many lawns in winter and early spring can be controlled in fall by using a preemergence herbicide that contains benefin, oryzalin, dithiopyr or prodiamine. These herbicides will control annual bluegrass, henbit and chickweed if applied before these weeds germinate. Apply the preemergent September 1<sup>st</sup>. Do not apply a preemergence herbicide if you are seeding a new lawn or overseeding. Other broadleaf weeds may be controlled with combination products such as Weed-B-Gon or Trimec after weeds have emerged and are growing. Always check the label to be certain that the product is recommended for the lawn grass to be treated and follow label directions.

### TIME TO SEED TALL FESCUE LAWNS

If you're having trouble getting grass to grow in a shady area of your yard, your best option may be a cool season grass called tall fescue. However, tall fescue must receive at least three hours of sunlight.

Ideally, fescue should be seeded in September so that it has sufficient time to develop before the onset of cold weather. A second choice would be seeding fescue in March. The primary drawbacks of spring planting are potentially wet conditions, cool temperatures, early spring weeds, and poor summer survival. If you plant in the spring, the grass usually doesn't have enough time to develop a healthy root system before it has to deal with the summer heat.

Many varieties of turf-type tall fescue are available. The turf-type tall fescue may be purchased as a blend of two or three varieties or you may purchase a single variety. The turf-type fescue makes a nicer looking lawn than the KY-31 tall fescue does. The turf-type fescue has about an eighth inch wide leaf blade where Ky-31 tall fescue is about a quarter inch wide. Also, Ky-31 will clump more when it thins out.

Because tall fescue is a cool season grass, it will need to be watered during the summer.

Prior to seeding, lightly till the soil. Remove as much debris and as many weeds as possible. Seed at the rate of 4 to 5 pounds per 1,000 square feet for establishment. At first glance, tall fescue seeding rates may seem high. It is a mistake to skimp on the amount used because an unsatisfactory stand will result.

Keep the area moist until the seeds germinate, which should occur in 10 to 14 days.

During planting, apply a complete fertilizer such as 13-13-13 at a rate of 8 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

Tall fescue lawns should be mowed at a height of 3 to 3.5 inches during the summer.

If you already have a fescue lawn, you may need to overseed it. Fescue lawns should be overseeded every fall to keep the stand thick, and especially after a hot, dry summer. Use 2 to 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet when overseeding.

**ARE YOU HAVING FLEA OR TICK PROBLEMS?** (By: Dr. John Hopkins, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Entomologist)

**Fleas**

The most common fleas that people encounter are found on cats and dogs year-round, but they most frequently appear during warm and humid weather. Fleas are attracted to animals by body heat, movement, and the carbon dioxide that animals exhale. These insects can also jump up to 150 times the length of their body to reach a host. Adult fleas feed on blood, while the immature larval form of the flea feeds on organic debris. The typical life span of the flea is more than 100 days - enough time for a pair of fleas and their descendants to produce millions of offspring. Under ideal conditions - and assuming that none die - a pair of fleas has the potential to produce more than 20 trillion descendants in one year.

People are most concerned with fleas because of the irritation, discomfort, and potential anemia associated with their bites and feeding. Fleas are also important vectors of disease. The most important diseases that fleas transmit to man are plague and flea-borne typhus (transmitted primarily by rodent fleas). Fleas also serve as intermediate hosts for some tapeworms (which infest rodents, dogs, and occasionally man) and a filarial worm of dogs. They may also serve as vectors of tularemia.

By treating infested pets and the interior of the home, most flea problems can be eliminated. However, treatment of the yard may be necessary when pets spend more of their time outdoors. A good way to tell if your yard is infested with fleas is to walk around the property wearing knee-high white socks. As you walk, fleas will jump onto the socks and can be easily seen against the white background.

Outdoor flea treatments should target areas where pets rest, sleep, and run (doghouse, kennel areas, under decks, along fences, next to the foundation). Rarely is it necessary to treat the entire yard or open areas exposed to full sun. Insecticide formulations containing a pyrethroid insecticide are somewhat effective for outdoor flea treatment, and these can be applied with a hose-end or pump-up sprayer. Long-term suppression of fleas infesting kennels or outdoor areas can be improved by using insecticide formulations containing an insect growth regulator (IGR) such as methoprene or pyriproxyfen.

You can successfully control a flea problem by following the steps above. However, if you lack the time to do your own flea control or are uncomfortable applying pesticides, you may wish to enlist the services of a professional pest control firm.

**Ticks**

Ticks are more closely related to spiders and scorpions than to insects. There are two groups of ticks: "Hard" ticks (*Ixodidae*) and "Soft" ticks (*Argasidae*). "Hard" ticks have hard smooth skin and an apparent head that is actually only the tick's mouthparts. "Hard" ticks transmit most of the common tick-borne diseases in the U.S. and throughout the world. They are most commonly found in the woods and on pets. "Soft"

ticks have tough, leathery, pitted skin and no apparent "head" (their mouthparts are hidden below their body's front end). They are usually found on birds, in caves, or rustic cabins.

Several tick species in the U.S. are known or potential vectors of tick-borne diseases that infect humans, pets, and livestock. Some of these diseases include Lyme disease, Southern tick-associated rash illness, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, tularemia, and ehrlichiosis.

Preferred tick habitats include woods, tall grass, weeds and brush. Ticks climb onto low vegetation and attach to suitable hosts, such as people or pets, when that host passes by. Ticks seldom pose a problem in well-maintained landscapes, although edges of property supporting tall weeds and brush can be a source of infestation.

The best way to avoid a tick bite is through prevention. One should avoid walking through uncut fields, brush, and other areas likely to harbor ticks. When enjoying outdoor activities in tick-infested areas, wear long pants tucked into socks and consider using tick repellents. Walk in the center of mowed trails to avoid brushing up against vegetation. Upon returning from tick-infested areas, inspect family and pets and promptly remove any ticks that are found. Trim grass and shrubs in your yard regularly, and keep overgrown vegetation cleared from the edges of your property. Ticks avoid direct sunlight and will not infest areas that are well maintained.

Free-roaming pets are much more likely to become infested with ticks than are those that are confined. A good way to determine if ticks are present is to drag a 3x3 ft. white cloth

through suspected areas. Ticks will attach to the sheet and be visible against the white background.

Treating lawns is of little benefit because short lawn grass is not a preferred habitat for ticks. If insecticides are used, treatment should be concentrated in areas where pets, rodents, and other potential wild hosts of ticks are likely to frequent, such as dog houses, fence lines, and along margins between wooded or brushy areas and the lawn. Insecticide formulations containing carbaryl or a pyrethroid have been effective in controlling ticks. Control may require more than one application.

### **HOUSEPLANT VACATION OVER**

Houseplants that were moved to patio or garden for summer vacations should be moved to a shaded location or a covered porch to begin the process of adapting for the winter indoors. Professional growers acclimatize (harden) houseplants by reducing the amount of light plants receive by at least 50% and by cutting back on watering and fertilization. This "hardens" the plant off and permits it to tolerate the rigors of life indoors without excessive leaf loss. The process requires 4 to 6 weeks to complete.

### **PLANNING FOR FALL AND WINTER GARDENS**

Flower lovers looking for alternatives to pansies and violas for their cool season gardens have a variety of plants to choose from. Gardeners can use plants that add color with flowers or foliage.

Dianthus, snapdragons and osteospermum are examples of plants that add interest with their flowers. Dianthus typically come in pinks,

purples, whites and banded types. If you want yellow flowers, you can't get them with dianthus.

You can add yellow with snapdragons, which also come in white, orange, red and coral.

Osteospermum look like daisies and come in white, pink and a soft purple shade.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with the more common pansies and violas. They give you those near-black violet colors along with blue, white and yellow.

Some of the plants that add color with their foliage are ornamental cabbage, kale and mustard. Swiss chard is a plant known for its colorful stems, and Dusty Miller has gray, or "silvery," foliage. Parsley has fine-textured, soft green foliage. All of the plants mentioned should do well unless we have a severe winter. We think of snapdragons as a spring or summer plant, but unless we have an extremely hard winter, they should make it, too.

Gardening in the fall is similar to gardening in the spring. For most of our soils, it would be a good idea to incorporate a composted organic material in the soil. A light application of a balanced fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or 13-13-13 would also be advised. Follow the label rate on the package.

Plants don't lose as much moisture during the fall and winter as they do in the summer, but plants still need water. A good soaking at planting is critical. After that, plants will need about a half-inch of water a week, either from rainfall or irrigation.

Putting an organic mulch around plants will suppress weeds and help conserve soil moisture.

### **PAPER WHITE NARCISSUS (Narcissus tazetta)**

For the impatient gardener and children accustomed to the fast pace of the video world, the paper white narcissus makes an excellent gift plant. With this bulb things happen in days, not weeks. Newly potted plants will bloom in three to four weeks, making it the fastest of all the bulbs to bloom.

The plant genus narcissus contains our common daffodil, also known as the jonquil. The paper white narcissus has typical daffodil bulbs and foliage. The white, extremely fragrant flowers, however, are produced in clusters of five to eight atop an 18-inch tall stem. The flowers are about 1 inch in diameter with the trumpet to only a quarter-inch long and cup shaped.

Paper whites are native to the warm temperate regions of the world with the white forms native to the Mediterranean region and the Canary Islands. The yellow flowered paper white (*f. orientalis*) are native to China and Japan and are sometimes called the Chinese Sacred Lily. Being from areas with a Mediterranean climate is an advantage to the gardener because these plants do not require chilling like the typical daffodil bulb. Simply pot them and they will bloom.

Bulbs are usually available in the fall. They may be placed in potting soil or in a shallow container filled with gravel. Paper whites can be planted in soil in 8- to 10-inch decorative pots. These are deep enough that two layers of bulbs may be planted, one above the other. By double planting, as many as 12 to 14 bulbs can be planted in a single pot. When the plants bloom there is a mass of flowers and, because the blooms from the lower set of bulbs are slightly

delayed, the pot stays in bloom for a few days longer.

If gravel planting is preferred, simply stick the bulb bases into the gravel and keep the water level high enough to keep the gravel moist. The roots will grow directly in the water, an uncommon characteristic for most bulb plants. This technique is a good method if children are watching the process because they can see both the roots and the top grow.

When forcing paper whites, give them as much sunlight as possible and keep the night temperature as low as possible, ideally below 60 degrees. Warm night temperatures cause the bulbs to grow very fast but the stems become floppy and fall over when blooms develop.

Paper white narcissus are hardy in all but the mountainous regions of the state, but they are not the best garden plants. Because they lack any requirement for winter chilling, the foliage begins to grow in the fall and during our winter anything above ground will be frozen. In the spring, the foliage continues to elongate from the bulb pushing these dead leaf tips into the air. This is not an especially attractive backdrop for the blooms which appear in April.

## **SUNFLOWERS**

Sunflowers should be harvested when the heads have fallen over and the back of the seed head is dry or when frost has killed the plant. Harvest the entire head with about a foot of stalk attached. Hang or lay it on a newspaper to dry in a well-ventilated area. Rub the seed head to dislodge the seeds and store in an air-tight container. If birds are a problem, you can protect the heads with a paper sack, bird netting or cheese cloth until harvest. Very heavy heads may need support.

## **BLACKBERRIES**

Blackberries bear fruit on the canes that grew the previous season. After fruiting, these canes die. These old canes should be removed each year sometime after harvest and before spring growth begins. New canes should be topped at about four feet to make the canes more bushy and thus, more productive. Blackberries are also forming fruit buds for next year's crop, so an inch of water per week will really pay off next spring when you are picking berries.

If you had white spots on individual drupes of blackberries or raspberries this year, it could be due to one of two things. Stinkbugs feeding on your fruit will result in a random pattern of white spots on mature fruit. By the time you see the spots, the damage is done and control is not possible. This is especially tricky in the fall-bearing red raspberries. You have flowers, young fruit and mature fruit at the same time. The first reaction is to spray to prevent further damage, but with flowers present you cannot spray insecticides because of bees and other pollinators. If you had damage this year, consider a pre-bloom spray directed at the base of the canes next year. Stinkbugs overwinter in debris on the ground, and this spray will reduce the population.

Another cause of white spots is sunburn. This is more common in raspberries, because blackberries are usually finished before hot summer weather. This differs from stinkbug damage in that the whole shoulder or face of the damaged area will be white.

**BAXTER COUNTY FAIR**

The Baxter County Fair is September 13 - 17 in Mtn. Home. Why not bring your plants, flowers, fruits, and vegetables to the fair. Horticulture entries will be checked in Tuesday, September 13 from 2:00 p.m. to 7:00 pm. Exhibits will be checked out from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Sunday, September 18.

For more information on any of the above topics, please feel free to contact me at 425-2335.

Sincerely,

Mark D. Keaton,  
County Extension Agent-  
Staff Chair  
MDK/sa