

Fall Lawn Care

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It is hard to believe with our 100 degree temperatures but it is time to apply a pre-emergent herbicide if you want to prevent germination of the winter weeds in the lawn. Annual blue grass, thistles, dandelions, rescue grass bedstraw, beggar's lice and many other weeds will sprout as soon as temperatures cool down in September. You need to have products like Amaze, XL, and Dimension applied before the weeds germinate. The products are granules and can be applied like fertilizers. Follow label instructions.

The rains that fell on August 7 and the rest of the month were very much welcome. It was enough to green-up Bermuda grass lawns that were allowed to go dormant. Once per week watering or rain will continue to do the job of keeping lawns green. The most efficient tactic is to use the irrigation recommendation supplied in the SAWS weekly landscape email (GardenStyleSA) to determine how much water the lawn needs that week. Adjust the application amount to meet the recommendation which is calculated from the past week's weather data. Your irrigation contractor will show you how to adjust the application rate. If that seems too much of a hassle, apply .75 inch water each week to grass in the sun and .5 inches/week to lawns in the shade.

October 1 is a good target date for the fall lawn fertilization. The fall fertilization is important because the nutrients are used by the grass plants in their defense against cold damage and as a nutrient reserve to supply the new growth in the spring. As days become shorter in the fall the growth patterns of our grasses change. Instead of producing more tall-growing blades, the nutrients from the fertilizer application is organized for dealing with the winter cold and the spring green-up. Use a fast release fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio in the fall. The first number represents the percentage of the nitrogen source in the bag. The second number is the percentage of the phosphorous and the 3rd number is the percentage of potassium. Fertilizer with formulas such as 18-6-12 or 15-5-10 are available. They also are labeled as "winterizer".

The grass is not going to grow much as we reach the fall change in grass growth patterns but continue to mow at the recommended heights to give the lawn grass an advantage over any weeds that grow. Mow St Augustine at 3.5 inches, zoysia at 2 inches, and Bermuda at 1.5 inches or less. Treat buffalo grass as a groundcover and mow it at 5.5 inches.

This time of the year insects and fungus diseases are common problems, especially in St Augustine grass. If you have brown areas in the hottest part of the lawn and it is not caused by drying out, suspect chinch bugs or Take-All-Patch fungus. If the roots are still alive the damage is probably caused by the chinch bugs sucking the plants juices. Chinch bugs can be easily controlled by using a soil insecticide. Follow label instructions.

"Take All Patch" is a tougher problem. The disease kills the grass, roots and all to create circular patterns of dead grass. Fungicides don't work well on the disease. The best treatment seems to be to apply a thin layer (.5 inch) of sphagnum peat moss over the damaged area and water it in. The peat moss acidifies

the infected area which eventually recovers. You will have to reapply the sphagnum peat moss several times over the fall and winter.

If the brown areas are in shadier moist parts of the lawn suspect grubs. The diagnosis becomes more certain if the grass foliage is disconnected from the roots like a toupee. The same soil insecticides that control chinch bugs, work for grubs but it is too late to treat them this year. They have eaten their fill and will eventually emerge as June bugs. Make a note on your calendar to treat for grubs in June of 2018 to prevent the same damage from occurring next year.

Another fungal disease, brown patch will show up this fall if your lawn has low spots and receives too much moisture. To prevent brown patch cut back watering in September and if you irrigate, only do it in the morning. Recognize brown patch when brown circles that keep growing appear. The lawn foliage is brown but the roots are still alive. Brown patch responds to reduced water application and to soil fungicides.