

## Horticulture 2008 Newsletter No. 42 October 22, 2008

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### Kansas Turfgrass Conference

The 58<sup>th</sup> Annual Kansas Turfgrass Conference will be held November 18, 19 & 20 at the Kansas Expo Centre, Topeka. Six different workshops will be offered on Tuesday, November 18: Basic Turfgrass, Advanced Turfgrass, Turf and Ornamental Pests, Athletic Field, Grounds Maintenance/Ornamentals and Irrigation.

By attending the Turf and Ornamental Pest Management Workshop on Tuesday, November 18 you can obtain 3.5 credit hours in 3A and 3.5 credit hours in 3B, as well as the core hour. Other credit hours are available throughout the conference.

Along with our educational portion of the conference, we will once again have an outstanding trade show to get the latest information on new equipment and products in the turfgrass industry.

To download a copy of the program and registration information, go to <http://www.ksuturf.com/Conference.html>

#### Spring Training

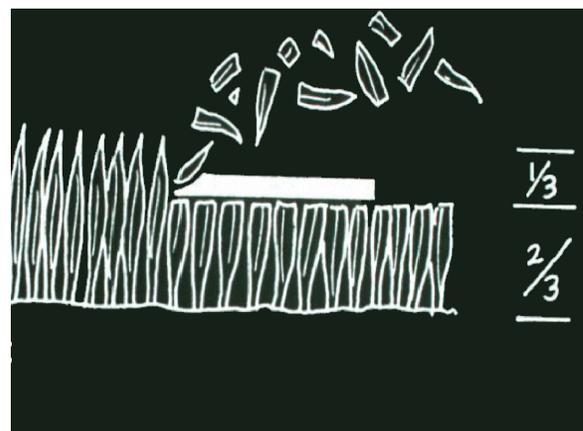
(For managers and employees of retail garden centers, grounds maintenance and landscape companies)

January 20, 2009 - Holiday Inn, Topeka

### TURFGRASS

#### Should You Let Turf Grow Tall in the Fall?

Sometimes you will hear people say to let the grass grow tall right before winter sets in. Their reasoning is that the extra foliage will insulate the crown of the plant from the extreme cold of winter. Although this may sound reasonable, in practice it probably does little, if anything, to



increase winter hardiness. On the contrary, a canopy that is too high during the winter may lay over and become matted down, leading to an increased incidence of winter-diseases such as snow mold.

Turfgrass species vary genetically in their cold tolerance, with warm-season grasses being less cold tolerant than the cool-season types. Given these differences, cold tolerance is improved by increasing the health of the plants going into the winter, and healthy plants are a result of a sound management program (fertilizing, watering and mowing) during the spring, summer and fall. The lawn will benefit more from continuing to mow at the recommended height than from trying to gain some insulation against winter cold by allowing it to grow tall.

Here is a list of the recommended mowing height ranges (in inches) for home lawns in Kansas:

- Tall fescue 2.5 -3.5
- Kentucky bluegrass 2-3
- Perennial ryegrass 2-3
- Buffalograss 2-3
- Bermudagrass 1-2
- Zoysiagrass 1-2

(Note: Mowing at heights below 1.5 inches requires a reel mower).

There may be some benefits gained by adjusting mowing heights WITHIN the recommended range at times. For example, it is a good practice to mow warm-season grasses at the higher end of recommended heights during late summer and early fall because this practice should help them store more carbohydrate reserves for the winter, and it may reduce the incidence of certain cool-weather diseases. But the rule to remember is to stay within the recommended height range for your species. (WU)

### **Tucking Your Lawnmower in for the Winter**



If you are done mowing for the year, be sure to service your mower before putting it away. Make sure you drain the gas tank of gasoline-powered engines or use a gasoline stabilizer. Untreated gasoline can become thick and gummy. A few drops of oil squirted inside the spark plug hole (after you remove the spark plug) will help lubricate the cylinder. While you have the spark plug removed, replace it with a new one.

If your equipment has a battery, clean the battery terminals, which usually corrode during the season. A wire-bristle brush is a good tool for doing this. The battery can then be removed or connected to a battery monitor that will keep it charged over winter. If you remove the battery, be sure to store it in a protected location for the winter (a cool basement works best).

Now is also an excellent time to sharpen mower blades so they'll be ready next spring.

Sharpening rotary mower blades is fairly straightforward. The following steps will guide you through this process:

- \* Check the blade for major damage. If you can't fix it, it likely will need to be replaced.
- \* Remove grass and debris from the blade with a moist cloth. Dry before beginning to sharpen the cutting edge.
- \* Remove nicks from the cutting edge, using a grinding wheel or hand-file.
- \* If using a grinding wheel, match the existing edge angle to the wheel. If hand-filing, file at the same angle as the existing edge.
- \* Grind or file until the edge is 1/32 inch, about the size of a period.
- \* Particularly with a grinding wheel, avoid overheating the blade as this may warp it.
- \* Clean the blade with solvent or oil, much like if you were cleaning a gun, for optimum winter storage. Avoid using water because it will promote rust.

Following these tips can help you better prepare your mower for winter storage and also save you some steps this coming spring. (WU)

### **Why Late Lawn Seedings Often Fail**



We normally recommend that Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue be seeded in September but no later than October 15. Though plantings later than October 15 can be successful, the odds of success diminish as time passes. This year has been so warm that those who planted a bit late will likely be successful.

The problem with late plantings is not that the seed will not come up or that young grass plants are sensitive to cold. Most often, the problem is with rooting. Unless the young grass plants have a fairly extensive root system, the freezing and thawing that takes place during winter heaves plants out of the ground, and they dry out and die. Regardless of when planted, be sure the new lawn is kept watered through the fall. More mature lawns will need less frequent watering but all should go into the winter with moist soil. (WU)

## **FLOWERS**

### **Garden Mums**

As soon as garden chrysanthemums are done flowering, you may cut the plants back to 2 to 3 inches high. Some gardeners prefer to leave the top growth so that it provides some protection from fluctuating soil temperatures. If you choose to cut the tops off, apply a layer of mulch over the top of your mums after the ground has frozen. Mums



should not completely dry out during the winter. It may be necessary to water occasionally if sufficient rain or snow has not fallen. (WU)

## PESTS

### Ash Seed Weevil



Last week we received a call from a homeowner about white particles on his driveway. A first assumption was that these rice-like particles were gall midge maggots. Fly maggots are legless and without a distinct head, but a closer look revealed distinct brownish head capsules.

The tree next to the driveway was an ash. Although the tree had dropped most of its leaves, the seedpods remained and appeared to be the source of the white particles.

Beetle larvae possess a variety of body forms. White “legless” larvae indicate weevils. Weevils found near ash trees with seedpods are most likely to be ash seed weevils. Close inspections of seedpods showed larval exit holes. Pods without exit holes were dissected and found to contain larvae. Ash seed weevils are nothing new. They were first described in 1876. Beetles range from 2 to 4 mm long and produce one generation per year. After seedpods have formed, beetles bore into the single seed within each pod using their small chewing mouthparts.

Typically, beetles deposit a single egg into the excavated cavity, and larvae develop throughout the summer. By fall, larvae drop to the ground and burrow into the soil where they overwinter. Others may spend the winter in seedpods, entering the soil in the spring from which the grubs eventually pupate. Adult emergence coincides with the formation of ash seedpods into which they deposit eggs for the next generation.

This situation raises many questions. This is the first time this homeowner has encountered this situation in 30 years at this residence. Why now and never before? Why his ash tree and not the neighbor’s several houses down? The larvae in his driveway appeared the morning of October 16, following an early-morning low temperature of 30 degrees F in the Manhattan area. Was this low temperature the cue/stimulus for the larvae to drop and seek overwintering quarters in the soil? Why did some remain in their seed homes, or will they soon exit, too? Or will they remain in their seedpods until next spring before exiting and entering the soil to join those that entered the previous fall? Are larvae all of one species, or one or two of the other three species that have been described in the literature? Larvae are unidentifiable; only capturing adults might answer this question. The bottom line is that there is no cause for concern. The situation is merely curious. (BB)

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