

Horticulture 2012 Newsletter No. 12 March 27, 2012

Video of the Week: [Growing Asparagus](#)

VEGETABLES

Asparagus Time!



Asparagus is one of those vegetables where freshness is incredibly important. If you have never eaten asparagus fresh out of the garden, try it. It may convince you to grow some of your own.

For those who have an asparagus patch, the new spears are starting to emerge or are close to doing so. The first asparagus that comes through the ground always seems to take a long time to reach harvest size. That is because asparagus growth is temperature dependent. The higher the day and

nighttime temperatures, the faster it grows. Also, the longer the spear, the quicker the growth. As the season progresses and spears get longer, the growth rate increases.

Harvest asparagus by snapping or cutting. Snapping is quick and easy. Simply bend the stalk near the base until it breaks. Snapped ends dry quickly so refrigerate or use soon after harvest. If you cut asparagus, use a sharp knife to detach the spears slightly below ground level. This base is woodier than snapped asparagus, so it doesn't lose water as quickly. Cut off woody ends before cooking. (WU)

Fertilizing Cole Crops

If you planted cole crops such as cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower around St. Patrick's Day, it is almost time for a fertilizer boost. These plants need to mature before summer heat arrives, so they must grow quickly while the weather is cool. A sidedressing of fertilizer about 3 weeks after transplanting helps plants continue to grow rapidly.

Use fertilizers high in nitrogen for sidedressing, such as nitrate of soda



or blood meal at the rate of 2 pounds per 100 feet of row. You can also use lawn fertilizers that have close to 30 percent nitrogen such as a 30-3-4 or 29-5-4, but cut the rate in half to 1 pound per 100 feet of row. Do not use lawn fertilizers that contain weed killers or preventers. Fertilizer must be watered in if timely rains don't do that job for you.

Recommendations on how to sidedress specific vegetable crops can be found at: <http://www.hfr.ksu.edu/doc1991.ashx> (WU)

TURFGRASS

Buffalograss Greening Up: Round-Up for Weeds?



Typically in February and March people call wanting to know how to control weeds in buffalograss lawns. They have heard they can spray Round-Up (glyphosate) on their lawn to control weeds. This is true. It is OK to spray Round-Up on dormant buffalograss. Because buffalograss is not growing, it will not absorb the herbicide and will not be injured. So Round-Up applications can be a cost effective, easy way to control many broadleaf and grassy weeds.

The problem is that buffalograss begins to grow in the spring sooner than most people think. For that reason, spraying glyphosate on buffalograss on warm days late in the fall, early winter (Nov-Dec) or even January is recommended, but spraying in February and March is not. Buffalograss starts to green up early. It looks completely dormant until you get down on your hands and knees and inspect the grass. I've seen many late treated buffalograss areas get set back. Fortunately, I haven't seen many of them get killed, but they were definitely stunted and slow growing for most of the season.

If you have broadleaf weeds in your buffalograss, spray it with a broadleaf herbicide. 2,4-D is the chemical that can injure buffalograss when it gets hot. Most people use Surge or Trimec Bentgrass formula. Drive (quinclorac) is a product I've used for many years on my buffalograss. I apply it at the center to control actively growing clover and crabgrass. (RST)

Crabgrass Germination: Do I Put Down Preventer Now?

With the unseasonably warm weather, we've been getting this question a lot lately. Crabgrass is an annual weed and must come back from seed each year. Because crabgrass must germinate from seed each year, crabgrass can be controlled by applying a



preemergent herbicide to the soil to kill germinating crabgrass seedlings. This is step 1 of most 4- or 5 -step lawn care programs. For the preemergent herbicide to be effective, it must be applied before the crabgrass seed germinates. (With one exception. Dimension, dithiopyr, has a little postemergent activity, so it can be put down as the crabgrass is germinating and it will kill young, 1- to 2-leaf, crabgrass plants and prevent new ones from germinating.)

Environmental cues are another way to determine the best time to apply preemergent herbicide. Typically, the time to apply preemergent herbicides is when the forsythia bush flowers or when the redbud tree blooms. During most years, the forsythia bush blooms fairly early in the spring. I usually tell people when they see the forsythia blooming, it is not too late, crabgrass has not germinated yet. But it is time to get your preventer and apply it soon.

Another option is to use soil temperature. Crabgrass typically germinates when the soil temperature is between 57 to 64oF at a 1-inch depth. K-State has a weather data library, and many of the locations have soil temperature probes. To find the soil temperature at a station near you, go to the Weather Data Library, <http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/wdl/> . There is a report of soil temperatures for the last week in the left hand column, but it is at the 4" depth. If you click on the first link, Kansas Weather and ET Data a map will appear. Click on the station on the map that is closest to you (or use the drop down menu, top-right). Choose your date range and place a check mark in the 2" soil temperature check box. Hit the submit query, and a report will pop up.

So What To Do This Year?

I haven't looked at all the weather stations around Kansas, but I'm going to guess that now is the time everyone should be getting their preemergent down. It is about 2 weeks earlier than the average year. I'm not a weatherman, and it could get really cold soon and stay cold, but it might not. I would apply a preemergent to lawn now.

Spring Seeding?

Remember, crabgrass preventers also kill turfgrass seedlings. So if you are going to seed, recently seeded, or if you dormant seeded, DO NOT apply crabgrass preventers.

Which Ones?

There are a variety of preemergent chemicals on the market and most of them work. But in tests at KSU and most of the research I've read, Dimension (dithiopyr) and Barricade (prodiamine) consistently provide the best crabgrass control. (RSJ)

Henbit in Lawns

The plant with the little purple flowers that have been showing up in home lawns is called henbit. If you are not sure this is what you have, check the stems. If they are square rather than round, you have henbit. Though it actually comes up in the fall, most people do not pay much attention to this weed until it starts to flower. Trying to kill it at this late stage



with an herbicide usually is a waste of time and money. Though the plant may be burned back, it will rarely be killed. So what should you do? Remember, this is a winter annual; it comes up in the fall, matures in the spring and dies as soon as it starts to get hot. All you can do now is keep it mowed until nature takes its course.

However, you can do something next fall that will help next spring. Henbit usually germinates about mid-October. Spraying with 2,4-D, Weed-B-Gon, Weed Free Zone, Weed Out, or Trimec in late October to early November can go a long way toward eliminating henbit next spring. Plants are small during the fall and relatively easy to control. Choose a day that is at least 50 degrees F so the henbit is actively growing and will take up the chemical. Spot treating will probably be needed in the spring to catch the few plants that germinate late. Use Weed Free Zone, Speed Zone, Weed Out, Weed-B-Gon, Trimec, or one of the special henbit herbicides early before the henbit has put on much growth. (WU)

Winter Grain Mites on Lawns



Though most mites are most active during the summer, a few actually prefer cooler weather. The winter grain mite feeds on a number of lawn grasses including Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and tall fescue from mid-fall to late spring. Summer is passed in the egg stage.

Damage is masked during the winter months because the grass is brown. When growth begins in the spring, the injury can give a silvery cast to the turf. Mites actively feed on cloudy days or at night.

Look for them at the edge of damage. Young mites are reddish-orange but become black with reddish legs in later stages.

Presence of this mite does not necessarily warrant spraying as plants most often grow out of the injury. If damage causes the turf to become unsightly, Lambda-cyhalothrin in liquid formulation (Bonide Beetle Killer, Scimitar, Spectracide Triazicide) or wettable powder formulation (Battle) are labeled against mites in general. (WU)

FLOWERS

Care for Spring-Flowering Bulbs

As spring-flowering bulbs go through the flowering process, keep three care tips in mind:

1. If practical, remove spent flowers with a scissors or a hand pruner. This allows the plant to conserve its energy for bloom the next year rather than using it to produce seed.



2. Allow foliage to die naturally — it is needed to manufacture food that will be stored in the bulb and used for next year's flowers.

3. Don't fertilize. The roots of these plants start to shut down after flowering. Fertilizer applied at this time is wasted. Instead, fertilize during the fall at the time bulbs are normally planted and again in the spring when new growth pokes out of the ground. (WU)

MISCELLANEOUS

How Early Are We This Spring?



I have tracked full bloom on a number of plants since 2005. Following is what I have for Eastern Redbud. Note that I missed 2009.

2005: April 9
2006: April 8
2007: March 30
2008: April 25
2010: April 9
2011: April 10
2012: March 21

Therefore, we are about 3 weeks earlier than normal. This has made a number of gardeners concerned as it is not likely we will make it through the rest of the spring without frost. Plants will probably be OK unless we have a repeat of 2007 where we had an early spring followed by temperatures in the mid- to upper-teens on April 5 and 6. Even in those extreme conditions, we didn't lose a lot of plants. But plants were weakened and more susceptible to other stresses. There isn't much we can do for most plants. Low-growing or small plants such as strawberries can be covered with sheets if a light frost is forecast. (WU)

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