

## Horticulture 2012 Newsletter

No. 18 May 8, 2012

Video of the Week: [Mulch - Beneficial for Flower Beds](#)

### FLOWERS

#### A Rose for Everyone



I was planning to save Knockout® Roses for later this summer, but I just can't help it—they look too good right now!

Who doesn't like roses? I love 'em, but I'm not particularly fond of plants that require a lot of maintenance. We've all grown up with hybrid tea roses, which were primarily selected for the flower. Breeders looked for a perfect "florist" rose shape, fragrance, color and perhaps plant hardiness. They weren't necessarily looking for a shrub with lots of foliage which is relatively disease free. Well, they

may have been looking for these things, but they have not yet all been found in the same plant.

I counted no less than 18 diseases of roses in my plant diseases resource book. You may be most familiar with blackspot, powdery mildew and rust. There are a number of chemical products that can be used to manage these diseases, but, in my opinion, the best method of disease control is choosing a plant that is resistant in the first place.

Your best bet, and the most widely available disease resistant rose, is Knockout® Rose. An American Rose Society winner in the year 2000, the Knockout® family of roses is quickly becoming one of the most popular in the U.S. And for good reason—it blooms continuously, grows to be a full shrub with very few, if any diseases, and is very low maintenance in terms of watering and pruning.

The trade off is that the flowers on Knockout® Rose plants are not particularly fragrant (compared to hybrid teas), nor do they have the perfect "florist" rose flower. But you can't beat these for productive, low maintenance plants if you're hunting for a great shrub for your landscape.

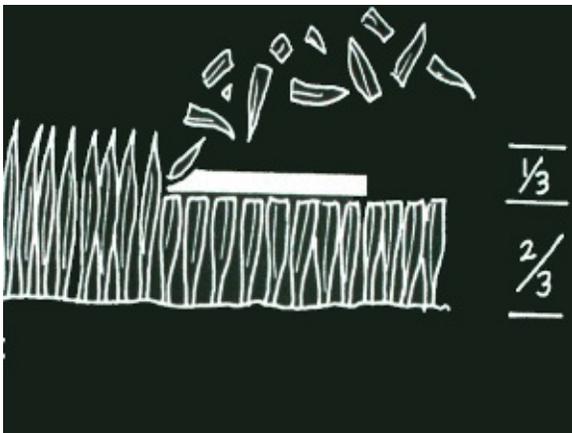
Knockout® Roses come in several flavors (varieties). Knockout® is red, though it's a bit neon if you ask me. Then there is Double Knockout®, which has double the petals on the flowers (Knockout® is a simple flower). After that, Conard-Pyle Nursery developed Pink Knockout®, Double Pink Knockout® (this is the one I planted in my yard), Rainbow Knockout® (simple with pink petals and yellow center), Blushing Knockout® (simple, light pink fading to almost white) and Sunny Knockout® (simple, yellow). I haven't seen as many of the last three in the landscape and I've heard that the color fades easily, though the plant itself performs similarly in terms of robustness.

Since Knockout® roses have been so popular, breeders have begun to develop more plants with similar characteristics. Selections you might find in your garden center include Oso Easy® (I've ordered Oso Easy® Mango Salsa to evaluate this year), Home Run®, and Flower Carpet Roses, just to name a few.

Of course, if you are a connoisseur of roses, then by all means, enjoy your collection. The rest of us who don't have as much energy to fuss over our roses now have some great options so that we can enjoy roses in our landscapes, too. There truly is a rose for everyone. (CRB)

## TURFGRASS

### How to Mow Your Yard: A Rebuttal of a *Consumer Reports* Article



I've been getting a few questions about an article in the recent *Consumer Reports* magazine. The article was written to help homeowners save time and reduce their workload in maintaining their landscape. The article had some good tips but I need to clarify one of the tips that was presented regarding the 1/3 rule of mowing. The 1/3 rule states that you should never remove more than 1/3 of the leaf tissue when you mow. One of the important facts of the 1/3 rule is that during some of the rapid growing times of the year, like spring and fall for cool-season grasses, you may need to mow

every 4-5 days instead of just once a week. But it also means during the slower growing times like July and August, unirrigated tall fescue/Kentucky bluegrass lawns may not need to be mowed but every 9-14 days.

When mowing, only remove 1/3 of the leaf tissue. For tall fescue this means you want to maintain at 3.5 inches high. Never let it grow higher than 4.6" before you mow it.

The article was written to save people time in maintaining their yard. *Consumer Reports* quoted a well-known turf scientist as saying, "Most domestic grasses can thrive with 50% or more of the blade removed." The article went on to state that "you can let the lawn grow to about 5 ½ inches before mowing. ...it will reduce mowing frequency by about 25 percent.... Hours saved

annually: up to 10.” I think these statements made by the turf researcher and *Consumer Reports* are incorrect and misleading. I’ll explain where the problem is below.

Why do we recommend the 1/3 rule? There are several reasons for following the one- third rule, but the most important are:

1. Health of the grass plant and lateral spread, and
2. Clipping management and environmental sustainability.

### **Health of the Grass Plant**

The researcher states that the plant will tolerate mowings that remove 50% or more of the leaf blade without undue harm to the plant. In the article he says, “(the 1/3 rule) was inspired by research conducted in the 1950 s by scientists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture who were evaluating Kentucky bluegrass as a forage grass. If you are feeding cows, the 1/3 rule will give you the most rapid leaf production. But, if your goal is a good-looking lawn, we’re now saying it is OK to take more off.” I agree that strictly speaking from the health-of-the-lawn perspective, removing more than 1/3 of the leaf blade would probably not cause too much harm to the individual grass plant. But there is more to the lawn than just one plant. Frequent mowing that comes by following the 1/3 rule stimulates lateral growth (sideways, across the lawn), and that is the type of growth we want. We want the grass to spend its energy and time spreading out across the lawn, not growing up into the air. This will create a thick, dense lawn that will look beautiful, be comfortable to walk and play on, and reduce weed populations. So if we take the turf researcher’s recommendation and remove 50% or more of the leaf blade each time we mow, the grass will be growing tall and not necessarily spreading out, possibly reducing the density of the lawn. We want to continue to follow the 1/3 rule to make sure we are mowing frequently enough at the right height to insure that the lawn continues to spread out and stay thick, rather than grow tall and spindly.

**Clipping Management and Environmental Sustainability**The second and equally important reason for following the 1/3 rule is clipping management. Most people bag their lawns, because they are not following the 1/3 rule and they leave large, unsightly clumps of grass on the yard. So they bag it to prevent the piles of grass from disrupting the appearance of the lawn and to prevent the piles of grass from accumulating that can actually smother and kill the lawn in spots. But by following the 1/3 rule, the clippings are cut small enough that they can be easily distributed across the lawn with a side discharge or with a mulching mower. So if you took the *Consumer Report’s* advice and decided to start letting the grass grow to 5.5 inches or more before you mow, odds are that the clippings will not be easily dispersed back into the lawn and you will have to bag it. I haven’t evaluated every lawnmower out there, but I suppose some mowers can successfully mulch that much grass without having to bag it. But most homeowners buy inexpensive mowers that are not the best mulchers and the homeowner will still end up bagging to prevent clumps of cut grass laying on the lawn.

I can’t stress it enough. Don’t BAG the clippings. First and foremost, those clippings contain nutrients and by recycling those nutrients back into the lawn, you can reduce your fertilizer needs by 25-33%. Secondly, in some cities those clippings end up in the landfill. Landfill space is

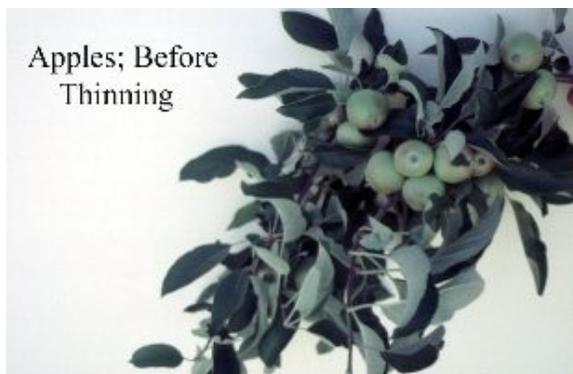
becoming smaller and smaller and we don't need to be adding grass clippings to the landfill when they can be recycled back into the yard. Some cities will collect the yard waste and compost it for their residents and some people compost their plant material on their own property. In those instances, removing the clippings isn't so bad, but it is still a lot of time and work and it will increase the amount of fertilizer you need to apply to your yard. So keep the clippings on your yard as much as possible.

The article also stated, "You should also bag clippings during a lawn-disease outbreak, in which case they might need to be taken to the landfill instead of being added to your compost pile." This statement is not true for almost all lawns in Kansas and Missouri. The fungal diseases that attack tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass are predominately brown patch and dollar spot, respectively. The organisms for these diseases are already in your soil, and collecting the clippings will not greatly reduce the severity or the spread of these diseases. The only time I'd be concerned about collecting and composting clippings is if you are applying pesticides. Read and follow the label. Most pesticides have a statement that says the clippings should not be collected for compost until 30 days have past, but some products have much longer wait times.

I do know that there are times like when you go on vacation or it is raining and raining and you can't get out in the yard and mow frequently enough. Think of the 1/3 rule and don't bag rule as 'guidelines.' Try to follow it as much as you can, but don't lose sleep about it when mother nature or outside forces prevent you from mowing often enough. Usually what I recommend in those situations where the lawn has gotten away from you and is really shaggy is one of two choices: mow it and bag it and then get back to following the rules, or mow it two or three times. First, raise the mower as high as it will go and mow it and mulch or side discharge the clippings back into the yard. Then, lower the mower a notch or back to your original setting and mow the yard again, either that same day or the next day. Mow and repeat if necessary until you get back to your recommended height. (RSJ)

## FRUIT

### Thinning Excess Fruit



Many areas of Kansas have avoided late freezes resulting in a heavy fruit crop this year. At first glance, this might seem to be a good thing. But too many fruit can cause problems that should be alleviated with thinning. For example, a heavy fruit crop can interfere with fruit bud development

this summer. This can result in a small to no crop next year. This problem most often appears with apples. Thus, thinning helps ensure that good crops are produced each year.

The second benefit of thinning is to promote larger fruit on this year's crop. Fruit trees are limited in how many fruit they can mature. Too many fruit and fruit size goes down. A third problem often caused by too many fruit is limb damage. Sometimes the weight of a maturing fruit crop can literally break branches. Thinning will help limit weight and preserve branches.

So how much thinning should we do? Thinning recommendations vary with the type of tree. Guidelines for fruit spacing are as follows:

Apples and pears: 4 to 6 inches apart;  
Peaches: 6 to 8 inches apart;  
Plums and prunes: 4 to 5 inches apart;  
Apricots: 2 to 4 inches between fruit.

These are averages and so you may have several fruit clustered closer than this distance. As long as the average on the branch is close to the recommended spacing, the fruit should size well. Cherries are not thinned and can produce a full fruit load. (WU)

## PESTS

### Miller Moths



There are several different species that are referred to as miller moths but the one we are seeing so much of this year is the moth of the army cutworm. These moths can seem to be everywhere; mailboxes, homes, garages, outbuildings, shrubbery and vehicles. Though they cause no damage, they can be an irritating nuisance. Keeping them out of places you don't want them is very difficult as they can invade through very small openings. Also, control is virtually impossible as those killed will be replaced by others migrating in.

These moths have distinct, but variable markings. There are five forms (see photo) in addition to the males being brownish and females more gray. These moths are not sexually mature yet and so do not lay eggs. The miller moth is migratory and will soon leave as they travel to Colorado. They then fly to higher elevations, feed and mature. Though bears eat them like popcorn (40,000 moths a day), there are still many left to return to the plains in the fall and lay eggs. Eggs hatch in the fall and partially grown larvae overwinter. The cycle starts all over again in the spring. (WU)

## Aphids



We noted in an earlier newsletter that aphids were attacking roses. However, aphids can attack many more plants including trees, shrubs and various herbaceous plants. Let's review aphids, how they feed and control.

Aphids are small insects, about an eighth of an inch long. They are soft-bodied, pear-shaped and of many colors, such as green, black, gray, yellow or red. Some are winged during certain times of the year.

Aphids feed by sucking sap from buds, leaves, twigs and developing fruit. Most of that sap is passed through their body and ejected through two small "pipes" known as cornicles that project from the rear of their bodies. This ejected, sticky material is called honeydew. This honeydew often becomes black with sooty mold fungus. Automobiles parked under trees with large aphid populations will often be spotted with honeydew. Though the finish will not be harmed by the honeydew, it is a hassle to clean off.

Aphids usually are controlled effectively by nature. Adverse weather conditions such as beating rains and low temperatures, as well as fungus diseases, insect predators and parasites, keep the aphids in check. Aphid enemies include lady beetles, syrphid fly larvae, aphid lions and small wasp parasites known as braconids.

Most insecticide applications destroy beneficial insects as well as pests and leave trees or shrubs unprotected if pest resurgence occurs. Because beneficial insects play an important role in natural aphid control, try washing aphids away with a forceful stream of water (if practical) before using insecticide sprays.

If control measures are warranted, use insecticidal soaps, horticultural oils, malathion, cyfluthrin or permethrin. Reapplication may be needed.

Imidacloprid (Annual Tree and Shrub Insect Control, 12 Month Tree & Shrub Insect Control, Max Tree and Shrub Insect Control, Bonide Systemic Granules IC, Bayer Tree and Shrub Insect Control) is a systemic insecticide that can be used to prevent aphid populations from building but must be applied early to allow time for the pesticide to move to the new growth. This time period may vary from one week to three months depending on the size of the plant with very large trees taking the most time. (WU)

## MISCELLANEOUS

### Moving Houseplants Outside for the Summer



It is often helpful to set many houseplants outside for the summer so they can recover from the low light levels endured during the winter months. As soon as night temperatures stay consistently above 55 degrees F, houseplants can be moved to their summer home. Choose a spot that has dappled shade, is protected from the wind and is close to water. A porch or a spot that receives shade from trees or buildings will work well. Putting houseplants in full sun will cause the leaves to photooxidize or sunburn because the leaves have

become adapted to low light levels inside the house. Where possible, sink the pots into the ground to help moderate root temperatures and reduce watering frequency.

If you have a number of plants, dig a trench 6 to 8 inches deep (or deeper if you have larger pots) and long enough to accommodate all of your plants without crowding. Place peat moss under and around the pots. Peat moss holds water, helps keep the pots cool and reduces evaporation from clay pots. About every two weeks, rotate the pots a quarter turn to break off any roots that have penetrated the peat moss surrounding the pot and to equalize the light received on all sides of the pot. Water as needed. If the potting soil is dry a half-inch deep in the pot, it is time to water. (WU)

### Rabbits in the Garden



Rabbits in gardens are a perennial problem because of the wide variety of plants they can feed on. This time of year, they gravitate to young vegetables and flowers. But there are some vegetables that are rarely bothered including potatoes, tomatoes, corn, squash, cucumbers, and some peppers. The question is how do you protect other, more susceptible plants? Fencing provides a quick and effective control method. The fence does not need to be tall; 2 feet is sufficient. But the mesh must be sufficiently fine (1 inch or less) so

young rabbits will not be able to go through it. Support for the fence can be supplied by a number of products, but electric fence posts work well.

Often fencing is not an acceptable choice because it affects the attractiveness of the garden. Other ways to control rabbits including repellents, trapping and shooting. Repellents are often suggested for control but often do not last long and require frequent reapplication. Also, many are poisonous and cannot be used on plants or plant parts destined for human consumption.

Live traps can be used to collect and move the rabbits to a rural area several miles from where they were trapped. A number of baits can be used to entice the rabbit to enter the trap including a tightly rolled cabbage leaf held together with a toothpick. However, rabbits often avoid baits if other attractive food is available.

Another possibility is to use a motion-activated sprinkler. These are attached to a garden hose and release a short burst of water when motion is detected. Contech and Havahart are suppliers and both are advertised as protecting up to 1,000 square feet.

Shooting is another possibility when it is safe and legal to do so. (WU)

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