

Video of the Week: [Overseeding Your Lawn](#)

TURFGRASS

Give Cool-Season Grasses a Boost



September is almost here and that means it is prime time to fertilize your tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass lawns. If you could only fertilize your cool-season grasses once per year, this would be the best time to do it.

These grasses are entering their fall growth cycle as days shorten and temperatures moderate (especially at night). Cool-season grasses naturally thicken up in the fall by tillering (forming new shoots at the base of existing plants) and, for bluegrass, spreading by underground stems called rhizomes. Consequently, September is the most important time to fertilize these grasses.

Apply 1 to 1.5 pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. The settings recommended on lawn fertilizer bags usually result in about 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. We recommend a quick-release source of nitrogen at this time. Most fertilizers sold in garden centers and department stores contain either quick-release nitrogen or a mixture of quick- and slow-release. Usually only lawn fertilizers recommended for summer use contain slow-release nitrogen. Any of the others should be quick-release.

The second most important fertilization of cool-season grasses also occurs during the fall. A November fertilizer application will help the grass green up earlier next spring and provide the nutrients needed until summer. It also should be quick-release applied at the rate of 1-pound actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. (Ward Upham)

Power Raking and Core-Aeration

September is the optimum time to power rake or core-aerate tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass lawns. These grasses should be coming out of their summer doldrums and beginning to grow more vigorously. This is a good time to consider what



we are trying to accomplish with these practices.

Power raking is primarily a thatch control operation. It can be excessively damaging to the turf if not done carefully. For lawns with one-half inch of thatch or less, I don't recommend power raking but rather core aeration. For those who are unsure what thatch is, it is a springy layer of light-brown organic matter that resembles peat moss and is located above the soil but below the grass foliage. Power raking pulls up an incredible amount of material that then must be dealt with by composting or discarding.

Core-aeration is a much better practice for most lawns. By removing cores of soil, core-aeration relieves compaction, hastens thatch decomposition, and improves water, nutrient, and oxygen movement into the soil profile. This operation should be performed when the soil is just moist enough so that it crumbles easily when worked between the fingers. Enough passes should be made so that the holes are spaced about 2 to 3 inches apart. Ideally, the holes should penetrate 2.5 to 3 inches deep. The cores can be left on the lawn to decompose naturally (a process that usually takes two or three weeks, depending on soil-type), or they can be broken up with a vertical mower set just low enough to nick the cores, and then dragged with a section of chain-link fence or a steel doormat. The intermingling of soil and thatch is beneficial to the lawn. (Ward Upham)

FLOWERS

Peonies May Be Cut Back Now



Peonies often look a little bedraggled by this time of year and gardeners may want to cut them back. That will not be a problem with this perennial. Peonies are essentially dormant by September 1 even though leaves may still be green. Cut leaves off close to the ground and compost or discard. (Ward Upham)

ORNAMENTALS

Big XII Gardening

Ready to gear up for football season, K-State fans? What better way to cheer on the Wildcats than by featuring plants with purple accents in your landscape. As you know, there are several categories of plants from which to choose including annual bedding/container plants, perennials, bulbs and woody shrubs or trees. Depending on your level of commitment to K-State-themed gardening, there are multiple ways to celebrate our beloved sports teams.



For instant color, consider a container combination with any purple (angelonia, petunia, etc.), white (petunia or vinca) or gray (lamb's ears) plants. Make sure they can all be grown in the same sun and water conditions. Check out www.prairiestarflowers.com for more ideas and cultivar recommendations. Go shopping at your local garden center and see what you can find!

For those of you who like to plan ahead, there are many woody plants that may take a few years to mature in your landscape, but are well worth the investment. Most feature purple blooms or purple leaves (specimen plants!). Download the new "Deciduous Shrubs for Kansas" publication (<http://www.ksre.ksu.edu/bookstore/pubs/MF3116.pdf>), open it on your computer and run a search for "purple" in the document. This should give you plenty of options.

One of the gardeners in my neighborhood celebrates Big XII football every year by painting a small wooden slate in the colors of the teams we will play. He places the blank slates on his fence and, after each game, he paints the score on the no-longer-blank slate. It's a great visual reminder of something that is important to him and of interest to lots of folks driving by. It also makes interesting and relevant garden art.

How about container gardening in the colors of the Big XII? If you think about it, throughout the 10 teams in the conference, the same colors are used in combination: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet, white, gray and black. You could grow containers that each feature a plant with one of these colors, then move them around in different combinations depending on which teams are playing at any given time. Sound like fun?

I had one more thought on Big XII gardening: plant a small arrangement along a fence or in a planting bed for each team in the conference, featuring their colors. Maybe with a scoreboard above it? Well... I suppose it wouldn't be a particularly great reminder if those flowers were still living long after the results of the game were available. Hmm... Roundup® the plants when we beat them? Ha! JUST KIDDING! (Cheryl Boyer)

Are Crabapples Safe to Eat?



Crabapples are safe to consume as long as you don't eat too many of them. Actually, the only difference between crabapples and apples is the size of the fruit. By definition, crabapples have fruit that are 2 inches or less in diameter, and apples are more than 2 inches in diameter. By this definition, most of the apples grown from seed will be crabapples. The fruiting apples are grafted. So did people ever plant crabapples from seed? Of course they did. Just think of Johnny Appleseed. But those apples were normally used for jelly,

applesauce, and cider and not for fresh eating.

There is one other caveat with using crabapples from a tree in the landscape. Make sure the tree hasn't been sprayed as an ornamental with a pesticide that isn't labeled for fruit tree apples. If it has, then the fruit should not be used. (Ward Upham)

PESTS

Yellow Jacket Season is Here

In the past two weeks an increasing number of calls have been received regarding honey bees, or aggressive honey bees at various K-State offices. Follow-up on these calls have revealed that these are not honey bees, but yellow jackets. Yellow jackets tend to begin most of their noticeable scavenging beginning around mid-August continuing until the fall weather turns cold.

Yellow jacket wasps are $\frac{3}{4}$ " in length and can resemble honey bees from a distance, but have a few distinctions. Yellow jackets are more likely to be around human food, pet food, and compost piles. They tend to nest in the ground, but can also be found in house cavities, tree cavities, or in compost piles which have not been disturbed. Honey bees have more hairs and are usually duller in color.

If you encounter a yellow jacket nest, it is best to leave the area. Yellow jackets are more likely to sting when a nest is near. They will also sting when trying to be swatted at or if accidentally encountered when drinking soda from a can they've crawled into.

To prevent encounters, remove attractive sources of food. Keep pet food covered or indoors, especially when not in use. Seal garbage cans and empty regularly. Pick up and dispose of ripe fruit. If you must move something in the area of a nest, it is recommended to do this before dawn or after dusk when yellow jackets are less active. (Sharon Dobesh)

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