

Horticulture 2011 Newsletter

No. 42 October 18, 2011

Video of the Week: [Planting Bulbs for Spring Color](#)

TURFGRASS

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.

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)

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)

VEGETABLES

Storing Tomato Cages



Be sure to clean any plant debris from cages before storing for the winter as disease can be carried over in dead foliage. Though disease spores can also be carried over on the cages themselves, storing cages outside will ‘sanitize’ them through the effects of sunlight and weathering. If, however, cages are stored inside a barn or garage, you may want to disinfect them by applying a bleach solution (10 parts water to 1 part bleach) with a sprayer. Be careful to wet down all parts of the cage. (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

Hackberry Psyllids Invading Homes



These small dark-colored insects are sometimes called jumping plant lice. The adults resemble cicadas in miniature form. They are about 1/8- to 1/5-inch long and small enough to enter homes through ordinary screens. These insects overwinter in buildings or in bark crevices on trees.

After mating in the spring, the females deposit eggs on newly emerging hackberry leaves. Nymphs hatch from the eggs and start feeding on the underside of the leaves. Galls form over the nymph and provide a protective covering. If you have ever seen the bumps on the underside of hackberry leaves, you know what these galls look like. Though these galls are unsightly, the health of the tree is apparently unaffected. Spraying the trees with an insecticide when the leaves are unfurling in the spring will eliminate some of the adults and nymphs before the galls have formed. However, good control is difficult to achieve. Once the nymphs are protected by the galls, chemical controls are ineffective.

Since these insects are specific to hackberry trees, only homes near a hackberry tree are affected. Several steps can be taken during the fall just before frost to reduce entry. Turning off outdoor night-lights and reducing the amount of light shining through night windows helps. Consider using fine mesh (18) screens on windows that are kept open. Ordinary screens are 12 mesh to the inch. Caulk or plug up cracks and crevices. Keep windows and doors closed when psyllids are active. For temporary reduction, spray exterior surfaces such as window screens, shutters and sides of buildings where psyllids are resting. Look for residual insect sprays labeled to use on outdoor surfaces. Examples of ingredients with residual action include cyfluthrin,

bifenthrin, permethrin, Baygon and tralomethrin.

If hackberry psyllids become a nuisance inside, use a vacuum cleaner to suck them up. Be sure to discard the bag immediately after vacuuming so they don't escape and re-infest the home. (WU)

Contributors: Ward Upham, Extension Associate

To view Upcoming Events: <http://tinyurl.com/fswqe>

[Horticulture 2011 E-mail Subscription](#)

For questions or further information contact: wupham@ksu.edu

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

“Knowledge for Life”

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service