

Horticulture 2011 Newsletter

No. 44 November 1, 2011

Video of the Week:

[Water Pine Trees Year-Round](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

Luncheon Series presented by *Friends of the KSU Gardens*

“Re-think, Re-design, Re-invent for the Holidays,” Ralph Diaz of Gaia Salonspa and Rob Dudley of Gatherings on the Prairie - Thursday, November 3, 11:45 a.m.-1:00 p.m., Colbert Hills Clubhouse, Manhattan. Cost: \$25 per person for lunch and lecture door prizes. Make reservations by Tuesday, November 1 by calling Anne Springer at (785) 532-1442 or e-mail spr@ksu.edu Net proceeds benefit the KSU Gardens.

VEGETABLES

Cleaning up the Vegetable Garden for Next Year



Cleaning up your vegetable garden now can help prevent insect and disease problems next year. Those who planted a fall garden may have to wait until the cool-season crops such as broccoli and cabbage are harvested before finishing the process.

If possible, till the refuse in rather than remove it. Large plants, such as tomatoes, may need to be cut into much smaller pieces before tilling so the vines don't wrap around the tines. Plant parts will decompose over winter. Any clods formed from

tilling will break apart due to the freezing and thawing that occurs during the winter months, leaving a soft, very tillable garden next spring. Remember to make a map of your garden before tilling so that crops can be rotated to different parts of the garden next spring. (WU)

TURFGRASS

Apply Late-Season Nitrogen Application in November



November is the time to give cool-season lawns the last nitrogen application of the season. Why November? Because while top growth slows in response to cool temperatures, grass plants are still making food (carbohydrates) by photosynthesis. A November nitrogen application helps boost the photosynthesis rate. Carbohydrates that are not used in growth are stored in the crown and other storage tissues in the plant. These carbohydrate reserves help the turfgrass green up earlier in the spring and sustain growth into May without the need for early-spring (March or April) nitrogen. Those early-spring nitrogen applications are less desirable because they can lead to excessive shoot

growth and reduced root growth. Other benefits of November-applied nitrogen for cool-season grasses include improved winter hardiness, root growth and shoot density.

How much should you apply? One to 1 to 1 1/2 pounds actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft of lawn area is sufficient. In order for this application to be effective, the nitrogen must be readily available to the plant, because the growing season is nearly over. Therefore, for a November application, use a soluble (quickly-available) nitrogen carrier such as urea or ammonium sulfate. Many turfgrass fertilizers sold in garden centers and other retail outlets also contain soluble nitrogen. Avoid products that contain water-insoluble nitrogen (slow-release) for this application. As always, sweep up any fertilizer that gets on driveways, sidewalks, or streets and reapply it to the lawn. (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 season (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 use of water as 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)

ORNAMENTALS

Prevention of Sunscald on Thin-Barked Trees



Applying tree wrap from the soil to the start of the first branches can protect recently planted trees from sunscald through the winter.

Many young, smooth, thin-barked trees such as honey locusts, fruit trees, ashes, oaks, maples, lindens and willows are susceptible to sunscald and bark cracks. Sunscald normally develops on the south or southwest side of the tree during late winter. Sunny, warm winter days may heat the bark to relatively high temperatures. Research

done in Georgia has shown that the southwest side of the trunk of a peach tree can be 40 degrees warmer than shaded bark. This warming action can cause a loss of cold hardiness of the bark tissue resulting in cells becoming active. These cells then become susceptible to lethal freezing when the temperature drops at night. The damaged bark tissue becomes sunken and discolored in late spring to early summer. Damaged bark will eventually crack and slough off. Trees will often recover but will need some TLC (especially watering during dry weather). (WU)

MISCELLANEOUS

Water the Compost Pile



The organisms that break down plant materials to form compost need water to live and grow. This fall has been so dry that compost piles are likely dry unless additional water has been added. Check the pile to see if the composting process has been completed in the center of the pile. If it has, turn the pile so that the material now on the outside is on the inside. Then add water so that it soaks through the pile. This will help increase the probability you will have finished compost next spring. (WU)

Caring for Houseplants During the Winter



Houseplants need varying amounts of water and fertilizer at different times of the year. They need the most during summer when light levels are high and days are long. They need the least during the short days of winter. The primary reason for this is light. Light fuels plant growth. More light allows more growth, which results in a greater demand for water and nutrients. When light is limited, the need for water and nutrients decreases dramatically. Therefore, it becomes easy to overwater and overfertilize during the winter months. Excess water and fertilizer can kill a plant by damaging the root system. Overwatering can suffocate roots by eliminating oxygen, and excess fertilizer can burn roots.

It is never wise to water on a set schedule. Rather, allow the potting soil to tell you when watering is needed. Check to see if the soil is moist 1-inch deep by inserting your finger into the potting mix. Don't water unless the mix is dry. Another method of determining when to water is the weight of the pot. Use the former method to determine how light the pot should be before watering.

Another common mistake homeowners make with houseplants is fertilizing during the winter in order to perk plants up. This is the exact opposite of what should be done. Remember it is a lack of light that gives plants the doldrums, not a lack of fertilizer. Therefore, it is best not to fertilize at all during the middle of winter (December-January) and to fertilize sparingly during November and February (maybe 1/4 a normal rate). (WU)

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

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

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