

THE GRAPEVINE

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Control Lawn Weeds Soon!

Late October to early November is the most effective time to control broadleaf weeds in lawns. Dandelions usually produce a flush of new plants in late September, and the winter annual weeds henbit and chickweed should have germinated in October. These young plants are small and easily controlled with herbicides such as 2,4-D or combination products (Trimec, Weed-B-Gon, Weed-Out) that contain 2,4-D, MCPP and Dicamba. Even established dandelions are more easily controlled now than in the spring because they are actively moving materials from the top portion of the plant to the roots in the fall. Herbicides will translocate to the roots as well and will kill the plant from the roots up. Choose a day that is 50 degrees or higher, with 60 degrees being ideal for this spray application. The better the weed is growing, the more weed killer will be moved from the leaves to the roots. Cold temperatures will slow or stop this process. Weed Free Zone (also sold under the name of Speed Zone) contains the three active ingredients mentioned above, plus carfentrazone. It will give a quicker response than the other products mentioned especially as temperatures approach 50 degrees. The other benefit to using the Weed Free Zone is that it provides excellent control of any clover infestations growing in your yard.

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.

White Grubs on Sidewalks and Driveways

We have had several reports of white grubs on sidewalks and driveways. These are likely the larvae of the green June beetle being driven from the lawn by excess water. To identify for sure, look at a crawling larva closely. Green June beetles are quite large at this time of year (up to 1.5 inches) and the larvae crawl on their back. No other white grub crawls on its back. Do not be too concerned that these insects are damaging the lawn. The larvae feed primarily on organic matter such as thatch and grass clippings unlike the May beetle which feeds primarily on living grass roots. The adult beetles usually show up in mid- to late-July and look much like our common May beetle (June Bug) but have a dull, velvety green and tan coloration. The underside is more of an iridescent green. They also differ from the May beetle in that the May beetle has a 3-year life cycle while the green June beetle completes its development in one year. Green June beetles lay their eggs in early August and hatch in about two weeks and start to feed. Only green June beetle larvae are present at this time of year as the adults died some time ago. Though the larvae rarely cause damage, the adults can be more of a nuisance. Green June Beetle adults feed on ripening fruits such as apricots, nectarines, peaches, plums, prunes, apples, pears, grapes, figs, blackberries, and raspberries. I have seen them most commonly on peaches and blackberries.

Hardiness of Cool-Season Vegetables

Cool-season vegetables vary in cold tolerance, with some able to take colder temperatures than others. Semi-hardy crops can take a light frost but are damaged by temperatures in the mid- to upper-20s. Examples include beets, Chinese cabbage, collards, Irish potatoes, Bibb lettuce, mustard, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard, and leaf lettuce.

Covering these plants when cold weather threatens can help extend the harvest season. Plants termed "hardy" can take lower temperatures but are damaged when the temperature drops to the low 20s. These include cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, carrots, turnips, and kale. Certain root crops can essentially be stored outside even after the leaves have been damaged or killed by frost. Beets, carrots, potatoes and turnips can be mulched and harvested as needed until the soil starts to freeze in late November to December. Growing vegetables in Kansas can be a challenge, but we have an extremely long gardening season. We can harvest from early April (asparagus) to early December. Winter is a good time to plan and prepare for next year's crops.

Winter Storage of Summer Bulbs

As winter approaches, we need to start thinking about storage of the bulbs that will not survive Kansas winters. The bulbs of gladiolus, caladium, dahlia, tuberous begonia, calla lily, and canna lily need to be dug and stored so they can be planted next year. Actually, the storage organ of the above plants is not a true bulb. Canna and calla lilies are rhizomes, caladium, and tuberous begonias are tubers, gladiolus is a corm, and dahlia is a tuberous rooted plant. All of these plants should be dug after frost has at least partially browned the foliage. Then, allow them to dry for about a week in a shady, well-ventilated site such as a garage or tool shed. Freezing temperatures should be avoided. Remove any excess soil and pack them in peat moss, vermiculite, or perlite. Make sure the bulbs don't touch so that if one decays, the rot doesn't spread. Dusting them with fungicide before storage will help prevent them from rotting. Caladium should be stored between 50 and 60 degrees F. The other bulbs mentioned should be stored as near 40 degrees F as possible. Finding a good spot to store the bulbs may be difficult. Some people place them against a basement wall farthest from the furnace and insulate them so the wall keeps them cool.

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 (a cool basement works best). Now is also an excellent time to sharpen mower blades so they'll be ready next spring.