

MANAGING TURF IN SHADE

Turfgrasses differ in their capacity to grow in shade. Among Kansas turfgrasses, tall fescue is the best adapted to shade though it isn't all that good. Although the fine fescues (i.e., creeping red, chewings, hard and sheep) have better shade tolerance, they lack heat tolerance and typically decline during hot Kansas summers. The warm-season grasses have the poorest shade tolerance, although zoysia does better than Bermuda or buffalo. Where shade is too heavy for fescue, there are other courses of action. The most obvious is to either remove trees, or to prune limbs and thin the tree canopies. Grass will do better under openly spaced trees than under closely spaced trees. Pruned limbs and thinned canopies will allow more sunlight to directly reach the turfgrass. If possible, raise the mowing height in the shade to compensate for the more upright growth of the leaves, and to provide more leaf area for photosynthesis. The thin, weak turf in the shade may tempt you to fertilize more. Remember the problem is lack of light, not lack of fertility. Too much nitrogen in the spring causes the plant to grow faster and may result in weak plants. The nitrogen rate for shaded grass should be cut back to at least half of that for grass in full sun. Late fall fertilization after tree leaves have fallen, on the other hand, is important for shaded cool-season turfgrasses and should be applied at a full rate. Irrigate infrequently but deeply. Light, frequent irrigation may encourage tree feeder-roots to stay near the surface, which increases competition between the trees and the turf. Restrict traffic in the shade if at all possible.

Many times, the best choice for shaded areas is switch from a turfgrass to a more shade-tolerant plant. For example, English ivy and periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) are much more shade tolerant than any turfgrass adapted to our area. Another option is simply to mulch the area where turf doesn't grow well. The trees will love the cool, moist soil and the absence of competition.

What's Bugging You This Spring???

The transitional periods from winter to spring and from fall to winter bring opportunities for some of our six-legged friends to make their presence felt. In the late-winter to spring period we have overwintering insects that are starting to move about after a long hard winter of being hidden in a crack someplace. It is very common for these critters to start to mass on the south side of buildings and other structures as they start to soak up the sun's rays and shake off the winter blues. Most often these are nuisance pests that do little to no harm to us or our belongings. But they are a nuisance none-the-less. The list of insects that commonly become a nuisance this time of year include box-elder bugs, elm leaf beetles, hackberry psyllids, and even the asian lady bug beetle. Most of these insects are overwintering adults that are looking to mate to insure the survival of the species. Because of this they are not real easy to control. We usually control insects by applying a control measure to what ever it is that they are eating, and these insects are not worried about eating, they just want to reproduce and then die. So what to do?

We can gain some measure of control by applying insecticides to hard surfaces that they congregate on or that they have to traverse to get to where they are going. Early spring and fall are the times that we can apply a barrier spray around our homes, up on the foundation, around the window sills and door frames, in the yard around the home and even where pipes or such may come in through the walls. The insecticides that work well for this type of barrier treatment include those that contain Cyfluthrin, Permethrin, or Deltamethrin as the main active ingredient. Of course being sure that our window screens and door thresholds are tight and secure go a long way in winning the battle against invasive pests.

Once inside the home we have little recourse for these critters. One way to eliminate them is to vacuum them up. If you use a vacuum to collect them be sure to empty the vacuum cleaner bag outside immediately or they will just crawl out into the closet that you keep your vacuum in.

Adding Organic Matter in the Spring

Organic matter is a good way to improve garden soil as it improves a heavy soil by bettering tilth, aeration and how quickly the soil absorbs water. However, organic matter added in the spring should be well decomposed and finely shredded/ground. Manures and compost should have a good earthy smell without a hint of ammonia. Add a 2-inch layer of organic matter to the surface of the soil and work the materials into the soil thoroughly. Be sure soils are dry enough to work before tilling as wet soils will produce clods.

To determine if a soil is too wet to work, grab a handful and squeeze. If water comes out, it is much too wet. Even if no water drips out, it still may not be dry enough to work. Push a finger into the soil you squeezed. If it crumbles, it is dry enough, but if your finger just leaves an indentation, more time is needed. Be sure to take your handfuls of soil from the depth you plan to work the soil because deeper soils may contain more moisture than the surface.

Pruning Raspberries and Blackberries

Raspberries and blackberries are perennial plants with biennial canes. In other words, a single plant will last many years but an individual cane will only live for two. In a cane's first year, it will grow but will not produce fruit. The second year, it will fruit and then die. Though these canes can be removed after they have finished fruiting, many gardeners wait until now to remove them. Dead canes are not difficult to identify. They are a much lighter color than live canes and are dry and brittle. These canes should be removed and discarded. The remaining canes should be thinned but the type of growth determines exactly how this should be done. Black and purple raspberries and thornless blackberries tend to grow in a clump. Remove all the canes but 5 to 7 of the largest and healthiest in each clump. Cut back the remaining canes to living tissue if there was winter damage. Thornless blackberries will also produce a few suckers that come up some distance from the clump. These should be removed or dug and transplanted to increase the planting. Red raspberries and thorny blackberries sucker badly and will fill the row with new plants. Prune out small canes within the row so that there are strong canes 4 to 6 inches apart. Head back all the remaining canes to about 5 feet. Keep aisles free of new suckers during the summer by mowing. We now have what is called everbearing red raspberries and everbearing thorny blackberries. These are the exception to the rule in that they will bear fruit on first-year canes. Therefore, you can cut all canes to the ground in the winter and still have fruit. Examples include Heritage red raspberry and Prime-Jim, Prime-Jan and Prime Ark 45 blackberries.