

TWIG DIEBACK ON OAK

Recently we have seen twig dieback on pin and other oaks caused by a fungal disease called Botryosphaeria canker. Affected trees show wilting or “flagging” of terminal growth on the ends of branches. Dieback usually extends 4 to 6 inches down the twig with leaves bending back toward the twig before turning brown. Dead leaves remain attached to the tree. If you look closely at the twig, you should see a rather marked transition from healthy to diseased tissue. Take a knife and scrape away some of the outer bark tissue. Healthy tissue is light green. Diseased tissue tends to be brown to black. Botryosphaeria canker differs from oak wilt in that only the tips of branches are affected. Oak wilt affects whole branches. This disease causes such minor damage that chemical control measures are unwarranted. Dead twigs on small trees may be pruned off if desired.

Spring Flowering Shrubs

August through September is the time period our spring-flowering shrubs set flower buds, and that is why we don't prune them at this time. But watering, as needed, at this time can help with next spring's bloom. Examples of spring-flowering shrubs include Azalea/Rhododendron, Vanhoutte and Bridal Wreath Spirea, Forsythia, Flowering Quince, Almond, Beautybush, Deutzia, Pyracantha, Lilac, Mock Orange, Cotoneaster, Weigela, Viburnum and Witchhazel.

Dividing Peonies

Peonies are a favorite perennial of gardeners because of their beauty and low maintenance. In Kansas, peonies provide a beautiful display of flowers each spring before Memorial Day. Though peonies can be left in place indefinitely, many gardeners wish to increase their plantings and use a process known as division to accomplish this. Keep in mind, however, that peonies often take about three years to return to full bloom and size after division. Fall is the traditional time to divide these plants. Peonies are essentially dormant by mid-August even though the foliage is still green. The first step in division is to remove the foliage. Then dig out the entire plant. Shake and wash off as much soil as possible so that the pink buds or "eyes" are visible. Peony roots are tough, and a sharp knife is needed to cut the roots into separate pieces. Make sure each division has three to four buds. Make sure the location chosen for planting receives at least a half-day of full sun. However, the more sun, the better. Space the plants so that there is at least 2 feet between dwarf types and 4 feet between the standard types. Follow the same rules for planting these divisions as you do for new plants. Make sure the pink buds are about 1 inch below the soil surface. If they are set more than 2 inches deep, flowering may be delayed or completely prevented. As you set the plants, firm soil often as it is added around the plant. If the soil is not firmed, it can settle and pull the plant down with it. Water in well after planting and water as necessary through the fall and winter to keep the soil moist. It is often a good idea to add mulch to the new planting to protect it from heaving. The alternate freezing and thawing that commonly occurs during Kansas winters can "heave" weakly rooted plants out of the ground. Add a mulch of straw, leaves, compost or other material after the soil freezes. Remember, it is not the cold that harms these plants but the alternate freezing and thawing of the soil.

Fall Lawn Seeding Tips

The keys to successful lawn seeding are proper rates, even dispersal, good seed to soil contact, and proper watering. Evenness is best achieved by carefully calibrating the seeder or by adjusting the seeder to a low setting and making several passes to ensure even distribution. Seeding a little on the heavy side with close overlapping is better than missing areas altogether, especially for the bunch-type tall fescue, which does not spread. Multiple seeder passes in opposite directions should help avoid this problem.

A more serious error in seeding is using the improper rate. For tall fescue, aim for 6 to 8 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet for new areas and about ***half as much for overseeding or seeding areas in the shade.*** Using

too much seed results in a lawn more prone to disease and damage from stress. The best way to avoid such a mistake is to determine the square footage of the yard first, and then calculate the amount of seed. Using too little seed can also be detrimental and result in clumpy turf that is not as visually pleasing.

Establishing good seed to soil contact is essential for good germination rates. Slit seeders achieve good contact at the time of seeding by dropping seed directly behind the blade that slices a furrow into the soil. Packing wheels then follow to close the furrow. The same result can be accomplished by using a verticut before broadcasting the seed, and then verticutting a second time.

Core aerators can also be used to seed grass. Go over an area at least three times in different directions, and then broadcast the seed. Germination will occur in the aeration holes. Because those holes stay moister than a traditional seedbed, this method requires less watering. If seeding worked soil, use light hand raking to mix the seed into the soil. Water newly planted areas lightly, but often. Keep soil constantly moist but not waterlogged. During hot days, a new lawn may need to be watered three times a day. If watered less, germination will be slowed. Cool, calm days may require watering only every couple of days. As the grass plants come up, gradually decrease watering to once a week if there is no rain. Let the plants tell you when to water. If you can push the blades down and they don't spring back up quickly, the lawn needs water. Once seed sprouts, try to minimize how much traffic (foot, mower, dog, etc.) seeded areas receive until the seedlings are a little more robust and ready to be mowed. Begin mowing once seedlings reach 3 to 4 inches tall. The first mowing is critical to start the 'stooling out' process, or thickening, of the newly planted grass plants. The first mowing should be at 2" and after that never lower than 3".

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 reserved for grasses that spread by stolons or rhizomes such as Kentucky bluegrass or Bermudagrass. It is not often used on Fescue because Fescue is a bunch type grass that rarely has a thatch build-up problem. It also 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 Fescue 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 power rake 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.