Article written by Calla Edwards Submitted by K-State Research & Extension - Butler County May 15, 2023

# **The Grapevine**

#### Warm Season Lawn Care

Warm season grasses are becoming more popular across the area as they are lower maintenance and tend to tolerate drought and heat better than cool season grasses. However, many people try to care for their warm season lawn just like they used to with their tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass yard when the new lawn requires a different treatment schedule. Let's take a look at how to properly maintain your zoysia, bermudagrass and buffalograss lawn.

Bermudagrass-Bermudagrass often gets a bad rap for invading flowerbeds or being kinda weedy in appearance however the newer varieties are less invasive and provide a higher quality lawn over some of the older varieties. The best time of year to establish a bermudagrass lawn is from Mid-May through July when the days are warm and there is no danger of frost. Bermudagrass can be established via sod, plugs, sprigs or seed depending on the variety you prefer. One key to a quality lawn is to make sure you are using a variety that is cold hardy enough to survive our winters as many varieties are developed in the southern part of the United States. The best time to fertilize is from May to August with 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet two to four times during the summer. Bermudagrass can be mowed as low as 1" high once or twice a week depending on how dense of a lawn stand you want or 2" every ten days for a low maintenance lawn. The best time to control weeds is in October with some spot spraying in the spring to control any stragglers. Bermudagrass only requires water during the very hot and dry months and prefers the sunniest location you can provide.

Zoysia- One of the lesser known warm season grasses zoysia forms a dense stand of sod through aboveground and underground runners. This grass is drought and heat resistant along with being winter hardy. The one down side is that zoysia is prone to having a build up of thatch if not properly maintained. Zoysia is best planted via sprigs, sod or plugs as this grass does not produce true to type via seed. The best time to plant is from May through June to give enough time for the plants to develop a vigorous root system before the first frost. You can convert a cool season lawn to zoysia by plugging the current lawn or adding strips of zoysia grass around the yard and then mowing at one inch to facilitate the spreading of the zoysia. It can take a couple years with this method to completely take over the current cool season lawn but it is less expensive. Zoysia can be mowed anywhere from ½" to 1 ½" tall depending on how often you want to mow, the taller the mowing height the less you have to mow. Fertilizer should be applied similar to bermudagrass with 2-3 pounds of actual nitrogen applied throughout the growing season from May through August in several applications. Zoysia will need to be dethatched on a regular basis for the best health of the grass. Weed control is best in the fall with spot spraying in the spring.

<u>Buffalograss-</u>This native prairie grass has been growing in popularity as a lawn grass due to its drought hardiness, low maintenance nature of needing little fertilizer, and its low growing nature means it needs very little mowing throughout the summer. While buffalograss doesn't need much water, it should be soaked thoroughly when it is watered. This grass can be planted via seeds, sod or plugs depending on your desire. Seed planting is best from April through June provided you can water the area on a regular basis to facilitate germination. If you use seed be sure to buy treated seed from a reputable dealer for the best start as buffalograss has a reputation for being harder to get started. While buffalograss seed is more expensive than other grasses you use less for the same area so the cost ends up being the same. The best time to fertilize is in early June with 1 to 2 pounds of actual nitrogen applied with a second application in mid-July if desired however buffalograss doesn't need fertilizer in low maintenance lawns. Mow buffalograss at 2 ½" to 4" for home lawns while low maintenance areas can be mowed higher if desired.

Warm season lawns are becoming more popular as a low maintenance lawn that is drought and heat resistant. One of the downsides I hear from homeowners is that the lawns are brown from first frost till sometime in April or May depending on the grass or that they don't have the same deep green color as cool season lawns however for many the benefits far outweigh the concerns. With proper care warm season grasses are a wonderful alternative to the traditional cool season lawn grass. It might take some adjustment on your part or the lawn companies to find the right treatment schedule for you but it can be done. Happy Growing.

# Garden Guide

Gardening is officially in full swing and the moisture we received is definitely appreciated across the county. For some of our vegetables we are entering the home stretch as lettuce, radishes and spinach planted early will soon be ready for harvest. For other vegetables we are just now entering a critical period to set them up for success for the rest of the growing season. Let's take a look as some important things to consider now:

- <u>Fertilizing Onions</u>. This is the time of year that onion plants start to grow and develop rapidly. Regular watering and some light fertilization will help to maximize their growth. In alkaline soils use ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) at the rate of ½ cup per 10 feet of row to side dress onions. Sprinkle the fertilizer 2-3 inches along side the row and water it in. Once onions have started to form bulbs do not add any additional fertilizer.
- <u>Water is critical</u>. While we had some rain it's important to develop a consistent watering routine now while adjusting for any rain we do receive. Improper watering can cause several issues in the garden including Blossom End Rot and encourage other disease issues. Blossom end rot is caused by inconsistent watering, allowing the plants to get dry then watering or watering constantly so the plants don't develop the root systems they need.
- <u>Mulch the garden.</u> All vegetables will benefit from some form of mulch in the garden. The mulch helps keep the soil surface cooler in the heat of the summer along with reducing the amount of weeding you have to do in the garden. Using mulch will also reduce the amount of water you need as it prevents the water evaporating from the soil and helps keep the soil moisture levels more consistent. Mulch can reduce the amount of leaf spot diseases in the garden by preventing the pathogens from splashing on to leaves from the soil. Hay and straw mulches are popular but may have some weed seeds. Leaves can be used as a mulch as can grass clippings.



Be careful not to use grass clippings that have been sprayed with a herbicide until the grass has been mowed for a fourth time.

### Insect of the Week- Dingy Cutworm

There have been several calls over the last week on a large number of "miller moths" that have been pests around lights and around doors or garages. These moths are called Dingy Cutworm moths. This moth is native to the entire United States. They are commonly found in gardens, agricultural fields and orchards. Adult moths are often hard to distinguish from other cutworm moths as the markings tend to disappear with age. In general cutworm moths are large and heavy bodied with light brown to gray markings on the wings. The larvae are heavy bodied and have a variety of different markings similar to the photo to the right. The moths we are seeing now overwintered as eggs or larvae in



weedy or grassy areas before feeding and then hatching as adults in the last few weeks. Cutworms are general feeders that

attack a wide range of plants from beans, cabbage, peppers, potatoes, corn and sunflowers. Cutworms get their name from the fact they curl their bodies around the stem of plants and feeding on the stem. This feeding causes the plant to be cut off just above the soil surface. Adult moths do not damage plants, they are simply a pest of households. If you start seeing plants that appear to have been cut off at the surface of the soil I would start looking for the cutworm larvae. If you can

find them they are easy to kill either by squishing them or dropping them in a bucket of soapy water. You can also exclude cutworms using a collars of aluminum foil or cardboard collars to create a barrier. Place the barriers around the plants in such as way one end is pushed a few inches into the soil and the other extends several inches above the ground. Chemicals can be used if there is a large number of cutworms however they usually aren't necessary.



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## Plant of the Week- Blue Wild Indigo

This week I want to highlight one of our Kansas native plants. The Blue Wild Indigo or *Baptisia australis* is commonly found on the eastern <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of Kansas and the United States in prairies, hillsides, road sides and further east along the edges of woodland areas. This native grows as a large, clump-forming shrub like herbaceous perennial. In ideal conditions this plant can grow from three to five feet tall with the bloom stalk and approximately five to six feet wide. The native version of *Baptisia* has pale blue or white flowers on an erect stalk. Once the flowers have died back large seed pods form that will rattle in the wind. The foliage of Blue Wild Indigo is gray-green to green in color with clover like leaves. While the native version is beautiful there are cultivated varieties with a range of colors from yellow to white to pink to a dark blue and a range of different sizes. Once established, Blue Wild Indigo is a very hardy, trouble free

perennial that possesses excellent drought resistance. They will need regular watering the first year or so as they are getting established but after that will only require watering during prolonged drought periods. *Baptisias* have very deep root systems and do not transplant well once established. To propagate these plants it's best to grow them from seeds or purchase small plants. Use Blue wild indigo as a specimen plant or as a background plant in a flower garden. These natives prefer full sun but will tolerate part shade with fewer blooms. The name, Blue Wild Indigo, comes from the use as a blue dye by Native tribes and early American settlers. The sap turns blue on exposure to air.



#### Issue of the Week- Leaf Scorch

The hot and dry weather has led to some damage on the tender new tree and shrub leaves around the county. This issue is called leaf scorch. Scorch is not a fungal disease but rather a physiological problem associated with damaged roots, limited soil area, or hot, dry winds. Moisture is lost so quickly from the leaves that the roots can't absorb and transfer water quickly enough to replace what is lost causing the leaves furthest from the roots start to burn around the edges. Though scorch is usually associated with droughty periods, it can appear even when the soil is moist. Newly planted trees or those who have small root systems are especially susceptible. Leaf scorch typically starts as leaf spots or burns along the margin of the leaf and may spread further into the leaf around the main leaf veins. Some trees such as maples, aspens or young oaks are

especially susceptible but the condition can appear on any type of tree including evergreens. The issue is often caused by an inadequate root system that is either underdeveloped or damaged by overwatering. Leaf scorch can also be caused by too much fertilizer being applied. Once leaf scorch appears there is no cure and the leaves will likely have the brown spots till they drop. While the leaves will not turn green again you can help the tree recover with proper water management. If we continue to have drought conditions be sure to water as deeply and infrequently as possible.

### **Reminders-**

- Harvest asparagus until spear size diminishes. Usually 6 to 8 weeks after first harvest.
- It is too early to spray for bagworms
- Start mounding soil or mulch around the stems of potatoes to keep the tubers from being exposed to the light. Exposure to light causes the tubers to turn green.
- Allow lawn to dry until see purplish areas in lawn before watering as this increase's drought hardiness.

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# Video of the week: Smart Watering in Gardens

We all know that plants need water to survive and perform well in the garden. Check out this video on Drip irrigation which is a great alternative to traditional watering methods. Watch the video here: <u>https://kansashealthyyards.org/all-videos/video/save-water-irrigation-for-gardens</u>

# **Upcoming Events**

- June 7<sup>th</sup> at Noon- Drought Tolerant Lawns of Kansas- Warm Season Turfgrass
  - Kansas weather is extreme, but summers are frequently hot and dry. Join Dr. Ross Braun, Assistant Professor of Turfgrass and Landscape Management, as he explains what it means to live in our "transitional climatic zone", with the option to grow both cool- and warm-season turfgrass species. Learn how to grow grass species that are more drought tolerant, in order to better survive our summer weather and conserve water. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: <a href="https://https//https//https//https//https//https//https
- July 5th at Noon- Solutions to Your Top Garden Insect and Disease Problems Insects, diseases, and weather related problems are always an issue in the landscape & garden. Judy O'Mara, Director of the K-State Plant Disease Diagnostic Lab, and Dr. Raymond Cloyd, Extension Specialist in Horticultural Entomology, are here to help! Learn to identify and solve the plant problems you should be on the lookout for, and bring your insect & disease questions for assistance from our experts. This class is offered online via Zoom. For more information on the Garden Hour series or to register visit here: <u>https://hnr.kstate.edu/extension/consumer-horticulture/garden-hour/</u>

