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PREPARE FOR FALL LAWN PLANTING

If you are planning on overseeding or establishing a Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue lawn this fall, preparations should start now. These preparations include taking a soil test and controlling weeds if necessary. A soil test will determine what nutrients are needed. Unless phosphorus levels are high, a starter fertilizer is recommended to encourage rapid germination of grass seed. Once the soil test results are received, the proper fertilizer can be purchased so it can be applied at seeding. Many areas of Kansas have received sufficient rainfall this summer that weeds, especially crabgrass, may interfere with seeding. If a lawn is being completely redone and weeds are a problem, a product with glyphosate such as Roundup or Killzall can be used to kill everything. Glyphosate is inactivated when it hits the soil and will not be taken up by underground roots. Avoid spraying exposed roots or leaves of any "good" plant. Wait at least two weeks before seeding.

Overseeding is used to thicken up a lawn. Normally we have bare spots that need to be filled in or a thin lawn that needs thickened up. We do not kill the tall fescue or bluegrass when overseeding. Therefore, we cannot use glyphosate to control weeds as it would also kill the turfgrass. Instead we use a selective herbicide that will control both broadleaf weeds and crabgrass. A number of those are listed below. Note that there is a waiting period between when the herbicide is applied and when it is safe to overseed. Usually this is about four weeks. However, check the label of the product you purchased to be sure you allow enough time.

- ✓ Ortho Weed B Gon Max + Crabgrass Control
- ✓ Bayer All in One Lawn Weed and Crabgrass Killer
- ✓ Fertilome Weed Out with Q
- ✓ Trimec Crabgrass Plus Lawn Weed Killer
- ✓ Bonide Weed Beater Plus Crabgrass & Broadleaf Weed Killer
- ✓ Spectracide Weed Stop for Lawns Plus Crabgrass Killer

Growing Grass in the Shade

We are often asked, "What's the best shade grass for Kansas?" The answer is simple but requires explanation. Tall fescue is the best shade grass for Kansas. That does not mean that tall fescue is the best shade grass of all those grown. True fine leaf fescues such as sheep's fescue, hard fescue, and creeping red fescue are actually better adapted to shade than tall fescue, but they have difficulty surviving Kansas summers. It might be better to say that tall fescue is the best shade grass adapted to Kansas conditions. Although tall fescue is our best shade grass that does not mean that tall fescue is all that good in the shade. Large trees that produce deep shade will not allow tall fescue to survive over the long term. I say "over the long term" because fall-planted cool-season grasses will often do well under shade trees through the fall and spring when there is less leaf cover and growing conditions are better (cooler and moister) than in the summer.

We often see people plant tall fescue in the shade each fall and then wonder what happens the following summer. The answer is stress from multiple fronts. Sunlight that passes through the leaves of trees has had most of the "good" light that drives photosynthesis stripped out. The grass struggles to make the food it needs for survival and growth. When this poor diet is combined with the additional stresses of drought and heat, tall fescue is unable to survive. So, what should you do if you have too much shade for your turf? You have three choices. Reduce the shade by pruning up the lower branches of your trees so more early and late sun reaches the turf. This is not practical with many trees because it can destroy the desired shape. A second option is to plant a groundcover that is well-adapted to shady sites such as periwinkle. Another solution would be to mulch the area under the tree.

Peonies May Be Cut Back Now

Peony foliage is attractive when healthy but powdery mildew and leaf blotch has made many plants look a little bedraggled this year. Therefore, gardeners may want to cut them back now. Peonies are essentially dormant by now even though leaves may still be green. Therefore, removing the foliage now will not harm the plants. Cut leaves off close to the ground and compost or discard. Mulch often contains plant debris which can carry diseases over to the following year so it should be discarded as well. Replace with fresh mulch.

Natural Needle Drop on Conifers

We are starting to see very noticeable natural needle drop on some evergreens such as arborvitea, pines and spruce. This is a process where 2- to 4-year-old interior needles turn yellow, then brown, and eventually drop off. Those who aren't familiar with this process often are concerned about the health of the tree. This is a natural phenomenon that occurs every year and does not hurt the tree. However, some years it is much more noticeable than others.

Pear Harvest

Most pear cultivars should not be allowed to ripen on the tree. They should be picked while still firm and ripened after harvest. Tree-ripened fruits are often of poor quality because of the development of grit cells and the browning and softening of the inner flesh. Pears ripen from the inside out and waiting until the outside is completely ripe will often result in the interior of the fruit being mushy and brown. Commercial growers determine the best time to harvest pears by measuring the decrease in fruit firmness as the fruit matures. This varies with growing conditions and variety. A Magness meter is used for testing and measures the pressure needed to push a 5/16-inch tip a specified distance into an individual fruit. Home gardeners can use these other indicators:

1. A change in the fruit ground color from a dark green to light green or yellowish green. The ground color is the "background" color of the fruit.
2. Fruit should part easily from the branch when it is lifted up and twisted.
3. Corking over of lenticels. Lenticels are the "breathing pores" of the fruit. They start out as a white to greenish white color and turn brown due to corking as the fruit nears maturity. They look like brown "specks".
4. Development of characteristic pear aroma and taste of sampled fruit.

Pears will actually be of higher quality if they are cooled immediately after harvest. Temperatures between 31 and 50 degrees will work with the warmer temperatures actually reducing the amount of chilling needed. Just don't go over 50 degrees. Homeowners may want to use a refrigerator, if possible. The amount of chilling required varies by cultivar from 2 days to several weeks. Pears ripen in one to three weeks after being removed from storage if held at 60 to 65 degrees F. They can then be canned or preserved. If you wish to store some for ripening later, fresh-picked fruit should be placed in cold storage at around 31 degrees F and 90 percent humidity. Placing fruit in unsealed gallon plastic bags can provide the necessary humidity. Ripen small amounts as needed by moving them to a warmer location and holding them at 60 to 65 degrees F. Ripening at too high a temperature (75 degrees F and higher) may result in fruit breaking down without ripening.