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THE GRAPEVINE

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TIME TO 'WINTERIZE'

Apply Late-Season Nitrogen Application in November

November is the time to give Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue lawns the last nitrogen application of the season. Why November? Because while top growth slows in response to cool temperatures, grass plants are still making food (carbohydrates) by photosynthesis. A November nitrogen application helps boost the photosynthesis rate. Carbohydrates that are not used in growth are stored in the crown and other storage tissues in the plant. These carbohydrate reserves help the turfgrass green up earlier in the spring and sustain growth into May without the need for early-spring (March or April) nitrogen. Those early-spring nitrogen applications are less desirable because they can lead to excessive shoot growth and reduced root growth. Other benefits of November-applied nitrogen for cool-season grasses include improved winter hardiness, root growth and shoot density. How much should you apply? One to 1 to 1 ½ pounds actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. of lawn area is sufficient. In order for this application to be effective the nitrogen must be readily available to the plant because the growing season is nearly over. Therefore, for a November application, use a soluble (quickly-available) nitrogen carrier such as urea or ammonium sulfate. Many turfgrass fertilizers sold in garden centers and other retail outlets also contain soluble nitrogen. Avoid products that contain water-insoluble nitrogen (slow-release) for this application. As always, sweep up any fertilizer that gets on driveways, sidewalks, or streets and reapply it to the lawn.

What to Do with Tree Leaves

It's that time of year again. Leaves are rapidly falling from deciduous trees so it's a good time to stop and think about options for handling the litter. Although a scattering of leaves won't harm the lawn, excessive cover prevents sunlight from reaching turfgrass plants. Turf left in this state for an extended period will be unable to make the carbohydrates needed to carry it through the winter. There are options for dealing with the fallen leaves other than bagging them up and putting them out for the trash collector. Composting is a great way to handle the refuse. Compost can then be used in the vegetable garden and flowerbeds. An even easier method of making good use of the leaves is direct incorporation in either vegetable gardens or annual flower beds. Use a lawn mower with a bagging attachment to chop and collect the leaves. Transport them to the garden or bed and apply a 2- to 3-inch layer of leaves on the surface of the soil and then till them in. Repeat the process every couple of weeks until you run out of leaves or the weather becomes too cold or the soil becomes too wet. With luck, you should be able to make 3 to 4 applications this fall. Another option is to mow the leaves with a mulching mower and let shredded leaves filter into the turf canopy. (A side-discharge mower also will work, but it won't shred the leaves as thoroughly.) This method will be most effective if

you do it often enough that leaf litter doesn't become too thick. Mow while you can still see grass peeking through the leaves. You may wonder whether this practice will be detrimental to the lawn in the long run. Research at Michigan State University in which they used a mulching mower to shred up to about one pound of leaves per square yard of lawn (one pound is equal to approximately 6 inches of leaves piled on the grass) for 5 consecutive years, found no long-term effects of the shredded leaves on turf quality, thatch thickness, organic content of the thatch, or soil test results (pH, nutrients, etc.). If you mow leaves and have a cool-season lawn, it makes sense to be on a fall fertilization program and core-aerate in the fall (things you should be doing anyway). With a warm-season lawn, you can still use this technique but wait to fertilize and core-aerate until next late May or early June.

Garden Mums

As soon as garden chrysanthemums are done flowering, you may cut the plants back to 2 to 3 inches high. Some gardeners prefer to leave the top growth so that it provides some protection from fluctuating soil temperatures. If you choose to cut the tops off, apply a layer of mulch over the top of your mums after the ground has frozen or if the forecast calls for a sharp drop in temperature. Mums should not completely dry out during the winter. It may be necessary to water occasionally if sufficient rain or snow has not fallen.

Roasting Pumpkin Seeds

Now that Halloween will soon be past, you may be wondering what to do with the pumpkins that were used to decorate for the holiday. Consider roasting the seeds before freezing temps destroys the pumpkin fruit. Cut open the pumpkin and remove the seeds and stringy material. Seeds should be washed and dried and the "strings" discarded. Toss the seeds with a little oil before roasting. Flavor can be enhanced by adding a sprinkling of salt to the oiled seeds. Seeds can then be spread on a cookie sheet and roasted for about 25 minutes at 325 degrees F. Times may vary depending on the size and moisture content of the seed. Seeds are done when they turn a golden brown. If seeds are not eaten immediately, store in a zip closure bag in the refrigerator.

Natural Needle Drop on Arborvitae, Pines & Spruce

We are starting to see very noticeable natural needle drop on some evergreens such as arborvitae, 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. Be sure to check that only the older needles are affected --the needles on the tips of the branches should look fine--and that there is no spotting or banding on the needles that are turning yellow.

Draining Hoses and Irrigation Lines

Hoses and shallow irrigation lines may be damaged over the winter if water is not drained. If there is a main shut-off valve for the system, close it and then run through the zones to make sure any pressure has a chance to bleed off. Lawn irrigation systems usually have shallow lines. Though some lines may be self-draining, check to be sure there are no manual drains. If manual drains are present, they should be opened. Be sure to map them so they can be closed next

spring before the system is pressurized. If there are no manual drains the system should be blown out with an air compressor. Lawn irrigation companies often offer this service. Drain hoses by stretching them out and coiling them for storage. Water will drain as you pull the hose toward you for coiling. Store in a protected place. UV light can make hoses brittle over time.

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