

## The Grapevine

### **Dormant Seeding of Turfgrass**

The best time to seed cool-season grasses such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass is September because the turf has more time to mature before spring crabgrass germination and the heat stress of summer. Dormant seeding of turfgrass is sometimes used to help fill in bare spots of lawns that weren't overseeded in the fall. Dormant overseeding is done during the winter (December –February) when it is much too cold for germination.

As with any seeding program, good seed-soil contact is vital. Several methods can be used. One method is to seed when there has been a light snowfall of up to an inch. This is shallow enough that bare spots can still be seen. Spread seed by hand on areas that need thickening up. As the snow melts, it brings the seed into good contact with the soil where it will germinate in the spring.

Another method is dependent on the surface of the soil being moist followed by freezing weather. As moist soil freezes and thaws, small pockets are formed on the wet, bare soil that is perfect for catching and holding seed. As the soil dries, the pockets collapse and cover the seed. A third method involves core aerating, verticutting or hand raking and broadcasting seed immediately after. Of course, the soil must be dry enough and unfrozen for this to be practical. With any of the above methods, seed germinates in the spring as early as possible. There will be limitations on what herbicides can be used for weed control. Tupersan (siduron) can be used as a crabgrass preventer on new seedings even before they have come up. Also dithiopyr, found in Hi-Yield Turf and Ornamental Weed and Grass Stopper and Bonide Crabgrass & Weed Preventer, can be used on tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and perennial ryegrass two weeks after germination. Dithiopyr is longer lasting and more effective than siduron. Other preemergence herbicides available to homeowners require that the turf be well established before application. (Ward Upham)

### **What is the “Wild” Shrub with the Bright Red Berries?**

People in the eastern third of the state have been reporting shrubs with bright red berries growing wild. The berries are clustered around the stem and the leaves are still a bright green color. These are likely one of two species of bush honeysuckle, (Amur or Tartarian), which can get 6-20 feet tall. This landscape shrub has become a serious understory invasive throughout the Midwest from eastern Kansas to Ohio. Many states have it on their noxious weeds list. All of our native honeysuckles are vines, similar to the vining Japanese honeysuckle. Bush honeysuckles are also noticeable in the spring as they put out leaves much earlier than most other trees and shrubs. Leaves also stay green much later into the fall. This long growing season gives it a competitive advantage over other native species, and the vigorous growth can take over a woodland understory, reducing the number of native woodland wildflowers and other shrubs. If you want to promote native species on your property, then controlling bush honeysuckles is needed.

Honeysuckle seedlings can be readily hand pulled when the soil is damp. Chemical control is needed for larger infestations, as cutting alone results in vigorous resprouting. Foliar applications of glyphosate (i.e., Roundup) in late summer and fall works well as does applications of Crossbow (2,4-D + triclopyr).

Treating cut stumps with concentrated (20% - 50%) glyphosate is also quite effective. Several studies have shown basal spraying with triclopyr (Garlon) not to be effective, while basal applications with 2,4-D or picloram products work well, using an oil carrier to penetrate the bark.

Cut stump and basal treatments can be done when the areas to be sprayed are dry and not frozen. Please follow all label instructions when using pesticides. (Charlie Barden and Ward Upham)

## **Compost Pile Maintenance**

Compost piles should be turned about once per month even during the winter months. This will ensure the composting process continues and that all materials are equally composted. A compost pile is “turned” when uncomposted material is moved from the sides and tops of the pile to the center where it provides “fuel” for the microorganisms that break it down. Water may need to be added if the material you move to the center is dry. Check the moisture content by squeezing a fistful in your hand. It should feel moist but no excess water should drip out. Compress the material in the pile as best you can as excess air can slow the composting process. (Ward Upham)

## **Poor Drainage in Garden Areas**

Winter is often a good time to fix areas in the garden where water sits and does not drain properly. Such areas often harm plant roots due to poor oxygen levels in the soil. Consider adding good topsoil so water doesn't sit. Be sure to till or spade the area to mix the new topsoil and the underlying existing soil. Plant roots do not like to cross distinct barriers caused by one type of soil sitting on top of another. Internal drainage can be improved by adding organic matter such as peat moss, rotted hay, cotton burrs, rotted silage, tree leaves or compost. This can be done by adding a 2- to 4- inch layer of organic matter to the surface of the soil and tilling or spading in as deeply as possible. (Ward Upham)

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