Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Office
206 N. Griffith, Suite A
El Dorado, Kansas 67042

THE GRAPEVINE

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Larry Crouse
Extension Horticulture Agent

Reminders

- Light pruning of shrubs and trees where 10% or less of the plant is removed can be done any time of year. Heavier pruning should be done in the spring if possible.
- Fertilize strawberry bed for added flower bud development and larger crop next year.
- Too late to spray for bagworms but can pull them off and dispose of them if practical.

GIVE COOL-SEASON GRASSES A BOOST

September is almost here and that means it is prime time to fertilize your tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass lawns. If you could only fertilize your cool-season grasses once per year, this would be the best time to do it. These grasses are entering their fall growth cycle as days shorten and temperatures moderate (especially at night). Cool-season grasses naturally thicken up in the fall by tillering (forming new shoots at the base of existing plants) and, for bluegrass, spreading by underground stems called rhizomes. Consequently, September is the most important time to fertilize these grasses. Apply 1 to 1.5 pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. The settings recommended on lawn fertilizer bags usually result in about 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. We recommend a quick-release source of nitrogen at this time. Most fertilizers sold in garden centers and department stores contain either quick-release nitrogen or a mixture of quick- and slow-release. Usually only lawn fertilizers recommended for summer use contain slow-release nitrogen. Any of the others should be quick-release. The second most important fertilization of cool-season grasses also occurs during the fall. A November fertilizer application will help the grass green up earlier next spring and provide the nutrients needed until summer. It also should be quick-release applied at the rate of 1-pound actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

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. It 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 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 fall apart 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. The mixing of soil and thatch is good to the lawn.

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

Preparing the Vegetable Garden for Next Year

If there are areas of the garden that are done producing, chop and shred residue in preparation for tilling. If soils are wet, wait a few days so the soil is no longer muddy. Tilling in residue allows plant material to decompose and helps reduce insect and disease problems for the next year.

Also consider using a cover crop to hold the soil and increase the organic matter content of the soil. Small gains such as wheat should be seeded at 3/4 to 1 pound of seed per 1,000 square feet from mid-September to late October. Spring oats can also be seeded until mid-September but the rate should be 2 to 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Spring oats will winter kill and can be tilled under in the spring. Legume cover crops such as hairy vetch, alfalfa and sweetclover provide an additional benefit by 'fixing' nitrogen, thereby increasing fertility of the soil. Each of these should be seeded at about 1/4 to ½ pound of seed per 1,000 square feet of garden. Sweetclover is seeded from August to early September and hairy vetch and alfalfa from mid-August to late September.

Cicada Killer…Not The Asian Giant Hornet

We are receiving inquiries regarding large wasps flying around. These are the Eastern cicada killer (Sphecius speciosus); not the Asian Giant Hornet (Vespa mandarinia). Cicada killer females search for, kill, and provision each cell within a nest located in the ground with a dog day cicada (Tibicen pruinosa) adult. The dead cicada is a food source for young cicada killer larvae. Cicada killers are an urban nuisance pest, especially when nesting in large numbers, in bare areas, in turfgrass, or around a structure. People are generally concerned because cicada killers resemble giant yellowjackets or they think cicada killers are the Asian giant hornet. Cicada killers are approximately 2.0 inches long and black with yellow-banded markings on the abdomen. The head and transparent wings are red-brown. Cicada killers are not dangerous, but they are intimidating; especially the males. Cicada killers are ground-nesting solitary wasps, with the female digging a 6 to 10-inch burrow (1/2 inch in diameter) in the ground; usually in sandy or loose soil. A pile of sand or soil, depending on soil type, will surround the entrance. Females search for and sting large insects such as a cicada or katydid, and then bring the immobilized or paralyzed prey back to the burrow. The female places prey into a chamber in the nest and then lays an egg on the body. Afterward, the female covers the burrow, digs another burrow, and repeats the process. A legless grub-like larva will emerge (eclose) from the egg and proceed to consume the prey. Full-grown larvae overwinter in the burrow, pupate in spring, and emerge as adults from July through August. Male cicada killers establish aerial territories and patrol for intruders. A male cicada killer wards-off other males that enter his territory and attempt to mate with females. An individual that walks into the territory is typically confronted by a very large wasp hovering in front of the face and 'zips' to the side and back. However, after determining that the intruder is not a rival or a threat, the male cicada killer ignores the individual. Nevertheless, an individual walking across a lawn, fairway, or other area where cicada killers are nesting, will experience the same treatment through each male's territory. After females have left the nest then males will eventually leave. Cicada killers, in general, will not sting an individual. Wasp and bee stingers are modified egg-laying devices (ovipositors), so males cannot sting. Females, however, may sting if crushed or if stepped on with bare feet, or grabbed with bare hands. Cicada killers are common in areas with bare soil, so mulching, planting ground covers, or sodding may reduce issues with cicada killers. Cicada killers can be a problem in well-maintained areas such as irrigated and regularly fertilized turfgrass. In addition, cicada killers can be a problem when nesting in areas accessible to or frequented by the public. Applying carbaryl or pyrethroid insecticides containing the active ingredients; permethrin, bifenthrin, cyfluthrin, and/or lambda-cyhalothrin to the burrowed area will kill females in golf course sand traps. In home yards, sandboxes should be covered with a tarp when not in use to deter cicada killers. Sand below swings, jungle gyms, or other playground equipment should be replaced with bark mulch or shredded tires. Managing cicada killers in baseball infields and volleyball courts is more challenging because people with minimal clothing and exposed skin are diving and sliding onto the ground; thus making it difficult to recommend using an insecticide. However, in the case of a volleyball court, a geotextile fabric placed beneath the sand may create a barrier that prevents cicada killers from creating burrows.

Larry E. Crouse
Butler County Horticulture Agent
K-State Research & Extension
206 N Griffith, Suite A
El Dorado, KS 67042
(316)321-9660
lcrouse@ksu.edu