Upgraded 2009 Horticulture Newsletter Index

Laura Dickinson, our Johnson County Extension Master Gardener Coordinator, suggested we index our 2009 Newsletter by subject rather than title. I agreed it was a great idea but knew it would take a great deal of time. Laura found a volunteer, Carole Brandt, one of our Johnson County Extension Master Gardeners, to do the work. This task took about 10 hours. Many thanks to Carole and Laura. This makes the index MUCH more useful. You can find the new index at: http://tinyurl.com/yzbw9dd.

TURF

Vole Damage to Lawns

The snow cover not only increased the incidence of snow mold on lawn grasses but also led to some areas experiencing vole damage. Voles are also known as orchard mice or short-tailed meadow mice and look like a stout, short-tailed version of a house mouse. They usually are not very noticeable in our landscapes unless we have a significant amount of snow cover. In such cases, voles will construct meandering pathways through lawn areas become apparent once the snow melts.

Though voles can cause significant damage, they often are more of a nuisance in Kansas. In most years, we don’t even notice they are around. Predators such as owls, coyotes, hawks, bobcats and house cats help keep them under control. They may be attracted to bird feeders as they can feed on seed that falls to the ground.

Vole damage is most severe when snow cover protects the rodents from predators and they become less selective in what they choose to eat. In such cases, they may cause more than usual damage to the bark of trees and shrubs in your landscape or orchard. If they eat all the bark in a circle around the trunk or stem, everything above that point dies due to the girdling.
If you have noticed vole damage to trees in your landscape, you may want to provide protection by encircling the trunk of trees with 1/4 inch hardware cloth. The hardware cloth may need to extend 3 to 6 inches into the soil and 18 inches above it to exclude these rodents.


(WU)

### Moldy Turf?

The prolonged snow cover this winter is leading to some snow mold development. There are several types of snow molds, and for more details you can view [http://tinyurl.com/yjegxa5](http://tinyurl.com/yjegxa5). In short, snow molds tend to occur where there is a long time-period of snow cover, especially where turf is matted down and when the turf was very lush at the time of the initial snow.

The picture shows a site here on campus where the snow piled up deeply. It’s an east-facing slope, so it took awhile to melt. And, as you can see, the turf must have been pretty long in the fall, leading to a matted-down/dense canopy that is ripe for snow mold activity.

What to do? In a home lawn/landscape situation the best approach is to rake through the area to loosen up the matting and promote drying. Next year, make sure to mow the area into the fall to prevent the dense matting that predisposes a site to snow molds.

For more details, and for the golf course managers out there, you might take a look at the link above. There are some additional links there, too. (MK)

### FRUIT

#### Time for Peach Leaf Curl Control

If you have ever seen emerging peach leaves that are puckered, swollen, distorted and reddish-green color, you have seen peach leaf curl. Uncontrolled, this disease can severely weaken trees because of untimely leaf drop when leaves unfurl in the spring. Fortunately, peach leaf curl is not that difficult to control if the spray is applied early enough. By the time you see symptoms, it is much too late. As a matter of fact, fungicides are ineffective if applied after buds begin to swell.
Recent cold temperatures should keep trees in tight bud long enough to find a window for application. Don't spray when temperatures will fall below freezing before the spray dries.

Peach leaf curl can be controlled by a single fungicide application either in the fall after leaf drop or in the spring before bud swell. There are several fungicides labeled for this disease including Bordeaux, liquid lime sulfur, and chlorothalonil (Ortho Garden Disease Control, Fertilome Broad Spectrum Fungicide, GardenTech Fungicide Disease Control, Gordon's Multipurpose Fungicide, and Daconil). Thoroughly cover the entire tree during application. Note that it is much easier to achieve good spray coverage if the tree is pruned before spraying. (WU)

Dormant Oil Sprays for Fruit Trees

There are a number of dormant sprays used on fruit to control various diseases and insects, but a dormant oil spray is designed to control scale insects. If you have a problem with scale, now is the time to start looking for an opportunity to spray. Normally spray should be applied by March 1, especially with peaches and nectarines. Apples are tougher, and application may be delayed up to the green tip stage. Temperatures need to be at least 40 degrees so spray has a chance to dry before freezing. If the spray does freeze before it dries, plant injury can occur. Applying the spray during the morning will help insure that it dries properly. Thorough coverage of limbs, branches and twigs is vital for good control. (WU)

MISCELLANEOUS

Leaching Houseplants

Everyone knows that someone stranded in the ocean should not drink the salt water. The salt content of that water will make a bad situation worse. What many people don’t realize is that this same principle can harm plants.

Fertilizers are salts. They must be salts in order for the plant roots to take them up. However, salt levels can build up over time and eventually may harm plant roots leading to scorched leaves and unhealthy plants. Though this can happen under field conditions, especially in low rainfall areas, it is particularly critical with houseplants.

Houseplants have a certain soil volume that doesn’t change until a plant is repotted. Thus salt build-up can be a crucial concern especially if plants are fertilized heavily. Leaching an overabundance of salts can be an important practice to insure the health of our houseplants.

Leaching is not a complicated or difficult process. It consists of adding enough water to wash out excess salts. How much water is enough? Add the amount of water that would equal twice the
volume of the pot. This, of course, would need to be done outside or in a bathtub or sink. Water must be added slowly so that it doesn’t overflow the rim of the pot.

If salt has formed a crust on the surface of the soil, remove it but don’t take more than 1/4 inch of the underlying media. This may also be a good time to repot the plant. (WU)

**Check Plants for Scale Insects**

The dormant season is a good time to check woody plants for scale insect infestations. This time of year, deciduous plants do not have leaves, so scale are more easily seen. If an infestation is detected, make plans to apply a dormant oil for control late this winter. Scale insects are easily overlooked because they are small and immobile most of their lives, and they do not resemble most other insects. Many of them resemble small shells that are oval or circular, but some have more unusual shapes like oyster shells. Coloring varies, but can include white, tan and brown. Plants that should be inspected for scales include apples, pears, other fruit trees, bush fruits, lilac, crabapple, oak, ash, elm, lilac, maple, linden, arborvitae, juniper, pine, spruce and yew. Manhattan euonymus is especially noted for having scale problems. Plants are not harmed if only a few scales are present. But scale population can increase dramatically during the growing season. Heavy scale infestations can damage fruit crops, destroy branches and kill entire plants. (WU)

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