TURFGRASS

Control Broadleaf Weeds in Lawns in Early November

Early November is the most effective time to control broadleaf weeds in lawns. Dandelions usually produce a flush of new plants in late September, and the winter annual weeds henbit and chickweed should have germinated in October. These young plants are small and easily controlled with herbicides such as 2,4-D or combination products (Trimec, Weed-B-Gon, Weed-Out) that contain 2,4-D, MCPP and Dicamba. Even established dandelions are more easily controlled now than in the spring because they are actively moving materials from the top portion of the plant to the roots. Herbicides will translocate to the roots as well and will kill the plant from the roots up. Be sure to choose a day that is 50 degrees or higher. The better the weed is growing, the more weed killer will be moved from the leaves to the roots. Cold temperatures will slow or stop this process.

Weed Free Zone (also sold under the name of Speed Zone) contains the three active ingredients mentioned above plus carfentrazone. It will give a quicker response than the other products mentioned especially as temperatures approach 50 degrees. (WU)

Tree Leaves and Turf

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. If you do not compost, you can mow 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 five 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 nitrogen fertilization program and core-aerate in the fall (things you should be doing anyway). If you have a warm-season lawn, you can still use this technique but wait to fertilize and core-aerate until next late May or early June. (WU)

**Tucking Your Lawnmower in for the Winter**

If you are done mowing for the year, be sure to service your mower before putting it away. Make sure you drain the gas tank of gasoline-powered engines or use a gasoline stabilizer. Untreated gasoline can become thick and gummy. A few drops of oil squirted inside the spark plug hole (after you remove the spark plug) will help lubricate the cylinder. While you have the spark plug removed, replace it with a new one.

If your equipment has a battery, clean the battery terminals, which usually corrode during the season. A wire-bristle brush is a good tool for doing this. The battery can then be removed or connected to a battery monitor that will keep it charged over winter. If you remove the battery, be sure to store it in a protected location for the winter (a cool basement works best).

Now is also an excellent time to sharpen mower blades so they'll be ready next spring.

Sharpening rotary mower blades is fairly straightforward. The following steps will guide you through this process:

* Check the blade for major damage. If you can't fix it, it will need to be replaced.
* Remove grass and debris from the blade with a moist cloth. Dry before beginning to sharpen the cutting edge.
* Remove nicks from the cutting edge, using a grinding wheel or hand-file.
* If using a grinding wheel, match the existing edge angle to the wheel. If hand-filing, file at the same angle as the existing edge.
  * Grind or file until the edge is 1/32 inch, about the size of a period.
  * Particularly with a grinding wheel, avoid overheating the blade as this may warp it.
  * Clean the blade with solvent or oil, much like if you were cleaning a gun, for optimum winter storage. Avoid using water because it will promote rust.

Following these tips can help you better prepare your mower for winter storage and also save you some steps this coming spring. (WU)

**VEGETABLES**

**Hardiness of Cool-Season Vegetables**

We have had a very mild fall thus far with many areas of the state not having gone through enough cold weather to cause severe damage to warm-season plants such as tomatoes, peppers and beans. However, cooler weather will eventually arrive and kill the warm-season vegetables. Cool-season vegetables are more cold tolerant with some able to take colder temperatures than others.

Semi-hardy crops can take a light frost but are damaged by temperatures in the mid- to upper-20s. Examples include beets, Chinese cabbage, collards, Irish potatoes, Bibb lettuce, mustard, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard and leaf lettuce. Covering these plants when cold weather threatens can help extend the harvest season.

Plants termed “hardy” can take lower temperatures but are damaged when the temperature drops to the low 20s. These include cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, carrots, turnips and kale.

Certain root crops can essentially be stored outside even after the leaves have been damaged or killed by frost. Beets, carrots, potatoes and turnips can be mulched and harvested as needed until the soil starts to freeze in late November to December.

Growing vegetables in Kansas can be a challenge, but we have an extremely long gardening season. We can harvest from early April (asparagus) to early December. Winter is a good time to plan and prepare for next year’s crops. (WU)
ORNAMENTALS

Why Isn't My Red Maple Red?

Why do some red maple trees have yellow fall foliage instead of brilliant red? Although fall color will vary with different environmental conditions, in many cases the yellow foliage of these red maples has to do with the genetics of the individual tree. Unnamed red maple trees grown from seed are not always brilliant red. They have highly variable fall color. If you want a red maple with red foliage in the fall, choose named, vegetatively propagated red maple cultivars such as Red Sunset, Burgundy Belle or Autumn Flame. October Glory has outstanding foliage color but is late in acclimating for winter and can be damaged by early cold snaps. However, even these "good" cultivars will vary in the level of "redness" from year to year. A number of things can reduce the intensity of color, including extreme heat or drought during the summer and cloudy days and warm nights in the fall. (WU)

FLOWERS

Perennial Garden Cleanup

Fall is traditionally a time for cleaning up gardens. Normally, we recommend clear-cutting dead stems to help control insect and disease problems. However, with herbaceous perennials that have been pest free, you might want to consider leaving some to provide structure, form, and color to the winter garden. For example, ornamental grasses can be attractive even during the winter months. But those near structures should be cut to the ground because they can be a fire hazard. Perennials with evergreen or semi-evergreen foliage can provide color. Of course, some perennials are naturally messy after dormancy and should be cut back in the fall.

Foliage may be left for other reasons. For example, foliage left on marginally hardy plants such as tender ferns help ensure overwintering of plant crowns. Also, seed heads on some perennial plants can provide seed for birds. (WU)
Clean up Iris Beds this Fall

Irises are known for a couple of common problems: a fungus disease known as iris leaf spot and an insect named iris borer. Though both cause problems in the spring, now is the time to start control measures. Both the fungus and eggs of the borer overwinter on old, dead leaves. Removing dead and infected iris leaves and other garden debris from the iris bed this fall reduces populations of these pests. This can significantly reduce problems next spring. (WU)

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. Mums should not completely dry out during the winter. It may be necessary to water occasionally if sufficient rain or snow has not fallen. (WU)

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