TURFGRASS

Overseeding a Lawn

Tall fescue lawns that have become thin over the summer can be thickened up by overseeding during September. Start by mowing the grass short (1 to 1.5 inches) and removing the clippings. This will make it easier to achieve good seed-soil contact and increase the amount of light that will reach the young seedlings. Good seed-soil contact is vital if the overseeding is to be successful. Excess thatch can prevent seed from reaching the soil and germinating. Normally we want 1/4 inch of thatch or less when overseeding. If the thatch layer is 3/4 inch or more, it is usually easiest to use a sod cutter to remove it. A power rake can be used to reduce a thatch layer that is less than 3/4 inch but more than a quarter inch.

Once thatch is under control, the soil should be prepared for the seed. This can be done in various ways. A verticut machine has solid vertical blades that can be set to cut furrows in the soil. It is best to go two different directions with the machine. A slit seeder is a verticut machine with a seed hopper added so the soil prep and seeding operation are combined. A third option is to use a core aerator. These machines will punch holes in the soil and deposit the soil cores on the surface of the ground. Each hole produces an excellent environment for seed germination and growth. Make 3 to 4 passes with the core aerator to insure enough holes for the seed. Using a core aerator has the additional benefit of reducing the amount of watering needed to get the seed germinated and growing. Aeration also increases the water infiltration rate, decreases compaction and increases the amount of oxygen in the soil.

Fertilizer should then be applied at the rate suggested by a soil test, or a starter fertilizer should be used at the rate suggested on the bag.

Seeding is the next step and is usually done with half the amount of seed used when working with bare ground. For tall fescue, the normal rate is 6 to 8 pounds per 1,000 square feet, and so
the overseeding rate is 3 to 4 pounds per 1,000 square feet. This should be broadcast over the prepared area.

Water everything in and then keep the seedbed constantly moist to ensure rapid germination. Frequent, light waterings should give way to deeper and more infrequent irrigation as seedlings become established. Fertilize again 4 to 6 weeks after seeding to keep plants growing well and to build up food reserves. Use a high-nitrogen fertilizer. (WU)

**The Incredible, Edible Sedge**

![Image of sedge grass]

Apparently sedges ARE edible. In case you missed it, here is a comment that was posted on the turfgrass blog last week:

Ah, but nutsedge IS edible! The little nutlets that make this weed a pain to control are perfectly edible. *Cyperus esculentus* — *esculentus* means edible. You can even buy *Cyperus esculentus* variety *sativus*, which has been especially selected for eating quality. The nutlets are usually called chufa nuts and they are used for a popular drink in Spain — Horchata de Chufa! I’ve eaten chufa nuts and they actually are quite tasty. If I can find some nutlets of variety *sativus*, I’m planning to plant them in a container next year. (Rebecca McMahon, Sedgwick County Horticulture Agent)

And, this one came in via the Facebook page of the other turf blog I contribute to:

Yes, you can eat nutgrass. It’s part of Chinese medicine.

Yes, you can eat spurge. Actually we eat them fresh and dehydrate them so we can eat on spring festival.

Now you know why America has more weeds to deal with than the Chinese.

There’s more information about the edible nature of yellow nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*) online here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyperus_esculentus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyperus_esculentus)

And, if you hunt online you’ll find more. Now, if only we could eat dollar spot, brown patch, *Pythium*, etc.

Two plant pathogens that ARE edible are corn smut:

This is a delicacy in Mexico, called Huitlacoche (sometimes spelled cuitlacoche). I’ve eaten it in various dishes. Lots of recipes available online!

And, another edible (err, drinkable…) pathogen is *Botrytis cinerea*. In most cases *Botrytis* causes a nasty fruit rot. You’ve seen this on strawberries that get gray-brown and fuzzy. Not too
But, in grapes, if the level of Botrytis is just right, you can make a very special wine called Botrytized wine, otherwise called “The noble rot.” Highly delicious! (MK)

FLOWERS

Peonies May Be Cut Back Now

If the foliage of your peonies is spotted and no longer attractive, it may be cut back now. Peonies are essentially dormant by September 1 even though the leaves may still be green. Cut the leaves off close to the ground and compost or discard. (WU)

VEGETABLES

Squash and Pumpkin Harvest

Summer and winter squash differ in how they grow and in what stage they are harvested. Summer squash tends to grow on compact, bushy plants and produces fruit that is harvested while immature. Zucchini, yellow straightneck or crookneck squash and bush scallop are examples of summer squash. Winter squash such as Butternut, Turban, Acorn, and Hubbard, are produced on large, trailing vines. Pumpkins are also classified as winter squash and share the same basic characteristics. Winter squash are harvested when mature, and those that are eaten are peeled. You can tell that a winter squash (including pumpkins) is mature by using the thumbnail test. Mature fruit have a hardened rind and cannot be punctured easily with a thumbnail.

Pumpkins should be cured by placing them in a warm, dry location for about 10 days. Choose an area where the temperature will not drop below 50 degrees because cold temperatures can shorten storage life. Actually, best curing is achieved at 80 to 85 degrees F and 80 to 85 percent relative humidity without water touching the pumpkins. Such conditions are difficult for a homeowner to produce, but should be attempted. Butternut, acorn, turban, Hubbard and other
squash types should be moved directly into storage without curing.

Acorn squash stores best at a temperature of 50 degrees F and 50 to 75 percent relative humidity. But it has the shortest storage time of 5 to 8 weeks even if these recommendations are followed. These conditions are also best for butternut and turban squash, as well as pumpkins, but these are more stable and will last from 2 to 3 months. Hubbards are the storage kings (5 to 6 months) but prefer a range that is a bit warmer (50 to 55 degrees F) and more humid (70 to 75 percent) than other types. (WU)

FRUIT

Storing Apples

You can enjoy apples from January to June with the right conditions. Some apple cultivars can be stored for longer periods than others. Some cultivars will stay in firm, crisp condition for about 6 to 8 months with good storage conditions. The approximate length of time cultivars will keep well under refrigerated conditions are as follows:

- Wealthy: 60 days
- Paulared: 90 days
- Gala: 120 days
- Jonathan: 120 days
- Grimes Golden: 120 days
- Golden Delicious: 150 days
- Empire: 150 days
- Delicious: 160 days
- Braeburn: 180 days
- Idared: 200 days
- Rome Beauty: 220 days
- Winesap: 220 days
- Fuji: 240 days
- Granny Smith: 240 days
- Arkansas Black: 240 days

The condition of the apples and how they are stored will strongly influence the storage period.

Some guidelines to help assure good quality and maximum storage life of apples include:

* Store only the best quality.
* Pick as they are first maturing.
* Avoid skin breaks, disease or insect damage, and bruises on individual fruit.
* Store in a plastic bag to help retain moisture in the apples. The bag should have a few small holes for air exchange. The bags of apples may be stored in boxes to prevent bruising if they must be stacked or moved from time to time.
* Refrigerate at about 35 degrees F. An extra refrigerator works well.
* Sort about every 30 to 40 days to remove fruit that may be beginning to rot. (WU)

**ORNAMENTALS**

**Tubakia Leaf Spot of Oak**

This common late-season leaf spot of oak is more severe this year than normal. It is late enough in the season that tree health should not be a concern.

Members of the red oak group are more likely to be affected than those in the white oak group, but members of both groups are showing symptoms now. Red oaks often have distinct round spots as well as dead areas that follow the veins. White oaks also have the vein necrosis and large blotches of dead tissue but lack the distinct spots. If damage is severe, leaves may drop. Even if an otherwise healthy oak loses all its leaves this time of year, the tree should be fine. It has had plenty of time to make the food reserves it needs to survive the winter. No fungicide sprays are recommended. (WU)

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**Sunflowers – Harvesting and Roasting Seeds**

Sunflowers are usually ready to be harvested beginning in mid September and into October. See heads can ripen on the plant, but they will need protection from birds. Try covering the heads with a paper sack or cheesecloth once the petals start turning brown. Use a twist tie or rubber band to secure the covering. This will not only help keep birds out but will prevent ripened seeds from dropping out of the head.

Check for maturity by looking for the following signs:

– Florets in the center of the flower disk (the brown center) should be shriveled.
– Heads should have turned down.
– The backside of the head should be a lemon yellow color.

The ultimate check, of course, is to pull a few seeds to see if they have turned the typical color — black with white stripes. Empty shells usually indicate a lack of pollination earlier in the year.

If heads are to remain uncovered, harvest when a few seeds start turning black and white. The flavor will not be good as when seeds are allowed to ripen on the plants, but fewer seeds will be lost. Cut the heads and place in a paper sack. Some people prefer to cut the heads with about a foot of stem attached and then hang them upside down in a dry, well ventilated area. A paper bag or cheesecloth can be placed over the heads to prevent seeds from dropping during the drying process. Seeds can be easily removed from dry heads by rubbing gently.

Roasting Seeds

Raw, mature seeds may be prepared at home by covering unshelled seeds with salted water (2 quarts of water to 1/4 to 2 cup salt). Bring to a boil and simmer 2 hours, or soak in the salt solution overnight. Drain and dry on absorbent paper.

Put sunflower seeds in a shallow pan in a 300-degree F oven for 30 to 40 minutes or until golden brown, stirring occasionally. Take seeds out of the oven and add 1 teaspoon of melted butter or margarine, or cooking oil per 1 cup of seeds. Stir to coat. Put on an absorbent towel. Salt to taste.

(WU)

Dragonflies

There are numerous species of dragonflies. Most often they are observed around bodies of water. This is logical because dragonflies are tied to a water environment. Dragonflies deposit eggs in water. Dragonfly naiads (aquatic nymphs) live in the water where they feed on aquatic organisms. When a naiad has completed development, it crawls out of the water and onto vegetation at water’s edge. It molts and the adult emerges.

Anybody who has tried to capture a dragonfly knows their speed and agility. Adults are constantly on the move, skimming over ponds, lakes, streams, marshes and grassy areas, in search of prey. They do not discriminate, but eat whatever passes their way. Dragonflies have large compound eyes occupying most of the head. They provide a 360-degree view and allow them to detect fast motions of other flying insects. Using their unique legs to form a basket, dragonflies swoop up their prey and eat while flying, resting only if they have captured larger prey that demands full attention.

Green darners are the largest dragonfly species in Kansas, with a wingspan of 4½ inches. Males have a distinctive blue/turquoise abdomen. The female’s abdomen tends to be purplish-grey. Green darners are also unique because they are a migrating species. But not all green darners migrate. There are resident populations that breed and live within a geographical area such as Kansas.
Migrating green darners leave from winter ranges in the southern U.S., the Caribbean and Mexico by riding north on warm springtime air fronts. When they reach the northern limits of their range, they produce the next generation of green darners, which move south in the fall to flee the cold. During fall migration, swarms of green darners may suddenly gather in staging areas and eventually coalesce to form swarms consisting of hundreds of thousands of dragonflies migrating in a single direction. At their winter destination, migrants produce the next generation of green darners, which will fly north in the spring.

The dragonfly swarms visible now are not migrating swarms. Their numbers are much lower than the hundreds of thousands in a migrating swarm, and they are flying in erratic circular patterns.

What is occurring now is common after a long period of hot, dry weather, right before or after a rain. Under these conditions, dragonflies gather over grassy areas, probably targeting small, flying insects for food. Swarms are composed mostly of male dragonflies, which extend their range further from water than females. Green darner dragonflies are the predominant species.

People assume these dragonflies are wrecking havoc on mosquito populations, but this is not likely. Mosquitoes are active in the evening. They rest on low shrubbery and bushes during the day. They rarely fly high because they find most of their food near the ground. Dragonflies, on the other hand, are active during the day. They fly high where daytime insects can be found.

Dragonflies do play a role in mosquito control because naiads are hunters, and mosquito “wigglers” (larvae) and “tumblers” (pupae) are fair game. They may reduce mosquito populations, but not much. Given the many alternative aquatic life forms for naiads to feed on, egg production capabilities of mosquitoes, and the fact that certain mosquito species deposit eggs in naiad-free mosquito breeding sites, mosquitoes are a fact of life that we must contend with — dragonflies or no dragonflies. (BB)

Contributors:
Ward Upham, Extension Associate; Bob Bauernfeind, Entomologist, Megan Kennelly, Plant Pathologist

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