Video of the Week: Check Your Garden for Insects

TURFGRASS

Bermudagrass Control

Bermudagrass can make a nice lawn if you don't mind its invasiveness and short growing season. But many people dislike both these characteristics. Warm-season grasses, such as bermudagrass, zoysiagrass and buffalograss, green up later than cool-season grasses such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass. They also go dormant earlier in the fall, which can make a lawn unattractive. Bermuda that invades a cool-season lawn will be brown during much of the spring and fall while the rest of the lawn is green. And it is much more drought and heat resistant than cool-season grasses, so it will take over a cool-season lawn during the summer months if it is in full sun. So how do you control bermudagrass that has invaded a cool-season lawn? Research conducted in 1996 showed that glyphosate (Round-up, Kleen-up, Killzall, Kleeraway) is the best herbicide for the job. Glyphosate is a nonselective herbicide and will kill everything—including tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass. You will need to reseed treated areas.

In our study, we applied a 2% solution of glyphosate on July 15 and again on August 15 on a bermudagrass plot that was more than 15 years old. Over one year later, we saw no regrowth. Glyphosate works best if bermuda is growing well. The better the bermudagrass is growing, the more chemical is taken up and pushed into the roots. Water and fertilize if needed to get it going.

Spray about the middle of this month (or when the bermuda is growing well) and again about a month later if there is any green left in the bermudagrass. Use glyphosate (2% solution). Wait two more weeks and reseed. It may also be helpful to scalp (mow as low as possible and remove clippings) the lawn two weeks after the first application so that dead grass does not prevent the glyphosate from reaching the recovering bermuda. (WU)
How to Pick a Ripe Melon

Telling when a melon is ready to be harvested can be a challenge, or it may be quite easy. It all depends on the type of melon. Let’s start with the easy one.

Muskmelons are one of those crops that tell you when they are ready to be picked. This can help you not only harvest melons at the correct time but also choose good melons when shopping. As a melon ripens, a layer of cells around the stem softens so the melon detaches easily from the vine. This is called “slipping” and will leave a dish-shaped scar at the point of stem attachment. When harvesting melons, put a little pressure where the vine attaches to the fruit. If ripe, it will release or “slip.” When choosing a melon from those that have already been harvested, look for a clean, dish-shaped scar. Also, ripe melons have a pleasant, musky aroma if the melons are at room temperature (not refrigerated).

Watermelons can be more difficult and growers often use several techniques to tell when to harvest.

1. Look for the tendril that attaches at the same point as the melon to dry and turn brown. On some varieties this will need to be completely dried before the watermelon is ripe. On others it will only need to be in the process of turning brown.

2. The surface of a ripening melon develops a surface roughness (sometimes called “sugar bumps”) near the base of the fruit.

3. Ripe watermelons normally develop a yellow color on the “ground spot” when ripe. This is the area of the melon that contacts the ground.

Honeydew melons are the most difficult to tell when they are ripe because they do not “slip” like muskmelons. Actually, there is one variety that does slip called Earlidew, but it is the exception to the rule. Ripe honeydew melons become soft on the flower end of the fruit. The “flower end” is the end opposite where the stem attaches. Also, honeydews should change to a light or yellowish color when ripe, but this varies with variety. (WU)
FLOWERS

Dividing Iris

Bearded irises are well adapted to Kansas and multiply quickly. After several years, the centers of the clumps tend to lose vigor, and flowering occurs toward the outside. Dividing iris every three to five years will help rejuvenate them and increase flowering. Iris may be divided from late July through August, but late July through early August is ideal.

Because iris clumps are fairly shallow, it is easy to dig up the entire clump. The root system of the plant consists of thick rhizomes and smaller feeder roots. Use a sharp knife to cut the rhizomes apart so each division consists of a fan of leaves and a section of rhizome. The best divisions are made from a double fan that consists of two small rhizomes attached to a larger one, which forms a Y-shaped division. Each of these small rhizomes has a fan of leaves. The rhizomes that do not split produce single fans. The double fans are preferred because they produce more flowers the first year after planting. Single fans take a year to build up strength.

Rhizomes that show signs of damage due to iris borers or soft rot may be discarded, but you may want to physically remove borers from rhizomes and replant if the damage is not severe. It is possible to treat mild cases of soft rot by scraping out the affected tissue, allowing it to dry in the sun and dipping it in a 10 percent solution of household bleach. Make the bleach solution by mixing one-part bleach with nine parts water. Rinse the treated rhizomes with water and allow them to dry before replanting.

Cut the leaves back by two-thirds before replanting. Prepare the soil by removing weeds and fertilizing. Fertilize according to soil test recommendations or by applying a complete fertilizer, such as a 10-10-10, at the rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet. Mix the fertilizer into the soil to a depth of 6 inches. Be wary of using a complete fertilizer in areas that have been fertilized heavily in the past. A growing number of soil tests show phosphorus levels that are high enough to interfere with the uptake of other nutrients. In such cases, use a fertilizer that has a much higher first number (nitrogen) than second (phosphorus). (WU)

ORNAMENTALS

Dutch Elm Disease (DED)

People often assume that Dutch elm disease has killed all American elms. Fortunately, this is not the case. Though many have survived, the number diminishes each year, with some years being more severe than others. Also, new American elms come from seed though these usually die while still a relatively young tree.
We are seeing numerous examples of Dutch elm disease on American elms this year. Though American elms are the species often associated with this disease, red and some hybrid elms are also susceptible. Siberian elm (sometimes referred to as Chinese elm) and the true Chinese elm (lacebark elm) are considered resistant but not immune to the disease.

Early diagnosis can help save recently infected trees. Look for branches with leaves that have wilted and suddenly turned yellow to brown. Remove a portion of the branch and peel back an area of the bark. If you notice brown streaking in the sapwood, you may have Dutch elm disease. Healthy bark is more cream-colored and the streaking is absent. Suspect wood should be submitted to the diagnostic lab, and control measures started immediately.

Dutch elm disease can often be controlled through the use of systemic fungicide injections, judicious pruning of affected trees and removal of nearby diseased elms. But trees infected through root grafts with nearby infected elms or those in which the disease has reached the main stem cannot be saved. It is too late to treat if more than 10% of the tree crown is showing symptoms. Preventative measures have a better chance of success and are preferred. Fungicides labeled for Dutch elm disease include Arbotect and Alamo. The Arbotect fungicide is preferred because it is the most persistent with a three-year interval between injections. A trained arborist should administer injections. These treatments are quite expensive. Check with your local certified arborist for current prices. (WU)

**PESTS**

**Budworms on Garden Plants**

If you have noticed a small hole in the buds of some of your flowers, you may have tobacco (geranium) budworm (Helicoverpa virescens). Though a number of flowers can serve as hosts, geranium and petunias are most commonly attacked. The larva of this insect damages the buds by boring into them before they open. The caterpillars feed on the flowers for about a month and then drop to the soil to pupate. There are normally two generations per year, with the second causing the most harm. The striped caterpillars vary widely in color with green, red, light brown and dark forms possible. The color of the larva is related to the color of the flowers on which they feed. The adult of this insect is a moth.

Damaged buds often fail to open. Those that do will show evidence of feeding on the petals. Damage normally peaks in late summer because of increased numbers from the second generation.

Control of the budworm is difficult. Handpicking at dusk can be effective on small plantings. For larger plantings, chemical control may be the only practical option. Look for products with synthetic pyrethroid active ingredients such as permethrin, esfenvalerate, cyfluthrin, bifenthrin,
lambda-cyhalothrin or related compounds. Spinosad (Borer, Bagworm, Leafminer and Tent Caterpillar Spray; Captain Jack's Dead Bug Brew) is also recommended.

Severe winters can be a natural form of control from one year to the next. Temperatures below 20 degrees F are hard enough to kill overwintering pupa. Because pupal cases are usually 2 to 6 inches deep, most exposed areas in Kansas will provide good control during a cold winter. Microclimates next to heated buildings may allow survival. (WU)

**Walnut Caterpillars**

If you notice leaves disappearing from walnut trees, it may be walnut caterpillars. Walnut caterpillars attack primarily black walnut, pecan, and several species of hickory trees, but may also attack birch, oak, willow, honey locust, and apple trees.

Walnut caterpillars overwinter as pupae underground beneath host trees. In late spring, moths emerge and deposit egg clusters on lower leaves. By the end of June, newly emerged and gregarious larvae skeletonize leaves. Larger hairy, brick-red larvae consume greater amounts of leaf tissue, and nearly matured gray larvae devour entire leaves, including petioles.

As mentioned earlier, walnut caterpillars are gregarious. In other words, they feed in groups. A single tree may contain several groups.

When disturbed, larvae arch their bodies in what looks like a defensive move. Larvae crowd together on the lower parts of trees to molt and leave an ugly patch of hairy skins. Mature larvae, 2 inches long, descend or drop to the ground where they enter the soil to pupate. A second generation occurs soon, creating the overwintering pupae.

Removing leaves with egg masses is an effective way to control walnut caterpillars. This may be impractical with large trees or when too many infested leaves are present. Bands of Tree Tanglefoot pest barrier may be used to snare larvae as they migrate to main branches or the trunk to molt. Insecticides such as spinosad (Conserve; Captain Jack’s Dead Bug Brew; Borer, Bagworm, Leafminer and Tent Caterpillar Spray) permethrin (numerous trade names) malathion or cyfluthrin (Tempo, Bayer Multi-Insect Killer) may provide the most practical means of control. (WU)
Ground Beetles

Recent blacklight trap catches have signaled the onset of 2011 activities for many different species of ground beetles. Of the 3,100 species in North America, Harpalus pensylvanicus is the prominent species. A cousin, Harpalus caliginosus, may also be found. The two can be easily distinguished by size. Harpalus pensylvanicus is smaller, 5/8-inch long by 1/4-inch wide on average. Harpalus caliginosus is almost an inch long and 3/8-inch wide.

Ground beetles are considered beneficial because the beetles and their larvae are predators that feed on other insects and small life forms. Both adults and larvae possess powerful mandibles.

Ordinarily they aren’t noticeable, but in fact they are everywhere. Populations peak on warm summer nights when beetles are restless and want to disperse. Bright lights attract hoards of beetles. Beetles enter buildings and homes by slipping through tiny cracks and crevices. Despite efforts to exclude them by sealing entry points, beetles seem to exploit tiny gaps. A perimeter spray treatment may help slow down beetles. But beetles may appear indoors again despite control procedures.

The good news is that the beetles are a temporary problem. They do not pose a health threat – they don’t bite, sting, or transmit disease. They will not survive and reproduce indoors. Not being fabric pests, they will not chew or stain curtains, furniture, clothing, or furs. Not being stored product pests, they will not contaminate food products. Sometimes insects have their way despite objections and attempts to stave them off. Gather them, by hand or vacuum, and dispose of them.

(BB)

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