Horticulture 2012 Newsletter
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Video of the Week: Overseeding Your Lawn at
http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/p.aspx?tabid=980&itemid=121&cmd=view#121

Kathleen Ward is Retiring

Kathleen Ward, our longtime horticulture newswriter and communications trainer, is retiring September 3, after close to 34 years with K-State Extension. If you’d like to tell her thanks or goodbye, or simply make her smile, you can do so in the retirement notebook that her unit is putting together.

Just make sure your contribution is flat. (Yes, a seed packet or pressed flower would be okay.) And, make sure it is no bigger than 8.5 x 11 inches. Then send your letter/page to Donise Osbourn, 20 McCain, Manhattan, KS 66506.

Let’s give Kathleen a great send-off! (WU)

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
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 three to four 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)

**Fall Lawn Seeding Tips**

The keys to successful lawn seeding are proper rates, even dispersal, good seed to soil contact, and proper watering. Evenness is best achieved by carefully calibrating the seeder or by adjusting the seeder to a low setting and making several passes to ensure even distribution. Seeding a little on the heavy side with close overlapping is better than missing areas altogether, especially for the bunch-type tall fescue, which does not spread. Multiple seeder passes in opposite directions should help avoid this problem.

A more serious error in seeding is using the improper rate. For tall fescue, aim for 6 to 8 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet for new areas and about half as much for overseeding or seeding areas in the shade. Using too much seed results in a lawn more prone to disease and damage from stress. The best way to avoid such a mistake is to determine the square footage of the yard first, and then calculate the amount of seed. Using too little seed can also be detrimental and result in clumpy turf that is not as visually pleasing.

Establishing good seed to soil contact is essential for good germination rates. Slit seeders achieve good contact at the time of seeding by dropping seed directly behind the blade that slices a furrow into the soil. Packing wheels then follow to close the furrow. The same result can be accomplished by using a verticut before broadcasting the seed, and then verticutting a second time.
Core aerators can also be used to seed grass. Go over an area at least three times in different directions, and then broadcast the seed. Germination will occur in the aeration holes. Because those holes stay moister than a traditional seedbed, this method requires less watering. If seeding worked soil, use light hand raking to mix the seed into the soil. A leaf rake often works better than a garden rake because it mixes seed more shallowly.

Water newly planted areas lightly, but often. Keep soil constantly moist but not waterlogged. During hot days, a new lawn may need to be watered three times a day. If watered less, germination will be slowed. Cool, calm days may require watering only every couple of days. As the grass plants come up, gradually decrease watering to once a week if there is no rain. Let the plants tell you when to water. If you can push the blades down and they don't spring back up quickly, the lawn needs water. Once seed sprouts, try to minimize how much traffic (foot, mower, dog, etc.) seeded areas receive until the seedlings are a little more robust and ready to be mowed. Begin mowing once seedlings reach 3 to 4 inches tall. (WU)

**VEGETABLES**

**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. But the recent extreme heat and drought may make tilling difficult. Wait until a soaking rain softens the soil, then 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. 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 should be seeded during from August to early September and hairy vetch and alfalfa from mid-August to late September. (WU)
Plant Triage and Watering

With many areas of Kansas under water restrictions, plant triage may be in order. In other words, determine which plants are the most important to save. Of course, if no outside watering is allowed, there aren’t many options. Mulching can help if the soil is moist enough to make preserving what water remains practical. Hopefully, outside watering can still be done on certain days in your area. If that is case, prioritize what plants are most important.

Large, established trees should be first on your list as they are expensive to remove, expensive to replace and take years to become large enough to fulfill their purpose. Next would be trees planted in the last 2 to 3 years as their root systems are still not completely established. Normally these trees would be first on our list as the larger, more mature trees are more drought resistant. However, this drought has been severe enough that we are seeing even large trees dying or becoming so weakened that borers move in and take them out.

Next would be shrubs, then perennial flowers and finally lawns, annual flowers and vegetables. You probably see the pattern here. Start with what is most expensive to replace and move down from there. For more information on watering trees, see our May 22 issue of this newsletter at http://www.hfrr.ksu.edu/doc3401.ashx . (WU)

Contributors: Ward Upham, Extension Associate

To view Upcoming Events: http://tinyurl.com/fswqe

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