Video of the Week: High Quality Grass Seed: Worth the Extra Cost

VEGETABLES

Harvesting Winter Squash and Pumpkins

Summer squash such as zucchini and scallop are harvested while immature but pumpkins and winter squash such as acorn, hubbard and butternut are harvested later, in the mature stage, after the rind is tough and seeds have developed. Pumpkins are also classified as winter squash and share the same basic characteristics including harvest recommendations. We normally think September is the time that winter squash are harvested. However the hot weather, drought and poor condition of the vines has led to early maturity of some fruit.

There are two main characteristics that help tell us when winter squash are mature: color and rind toughness.

Winter squash change color as they become mature. Butternut changes from light beige to deep tan. Acorn is a deep green color but has a ground spot that changes from yellow to orange when ripe. Gray or orange is the mature color for hubbard and orange is the color for pumpkins.

Hard, tough rinds is another characteristic of mature winter squash. This is easily checked by trying to puncture the rind with your thumbnail or fingernail. If it easily penetrates the skin, the squash is not yet mature and will lose water through the skin -- causing the fruit to dry and shrivel. Also, immature fruit will be of low quality. The stem should also be dry enough that excessive water doesn’t drip from the stem.

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.

Winter squash should be stored cool with elevated humidity. Ideal conditions would be 55 to 60 degrees F and 50 to 70 percent relative humidity. Under such conditions, acorn squash will usually last about 5 to 8 weeks, butternuts 2 to 3 months and hubbards 5 to 6 months. (WU)
**Recommended Tall Fescue Cultivars**

Though several cool-season grasses are grown in Kansas, tall fescue is considered the best adapted and is recommended for home lawns. The cultivar K-31 is the old standby and has been used for years. However, there are a myriad of newer cultivars that have improved color, density and a finer leaf texture. Most of these newer varieties are very close to one another in quality.

Each year the National Turfgrass Evaluation Trial rates tall fescue varieties for color, greenup, quality and texture. Quality ratings are taken once a month from March through October. K-31 consistently rates at the bottom. The recommended cultivars were 3rd Millennium, Biltmore, Braveheart, Escalade, Faith, Finelawn Xpress, Firecracker, Gazelle II, Honkey Tonk, Hudson, Hunter, Padre, Pedigree, Raptor II, Reunion, Rambler SRP, RK4, Sidewinder, Skylane, Speedway, SR 8650, Talladega, Titanium LS, Turbo and Wolfpack II. Keep in mind that mixes of several varieties may allow you to take advantage of differing strengths. It is not necessary for mixes to contain only the varieties mentioned above.

Though K-31 may still be a good choice for large, open areas, the new cultivars will give better performance for those who desire a high-quality turf. (WU)

**Kentucky Bluegrass Variety Selection for Cool-Season Lawns**

Though Kentucky bluegrass is not as heat and drought tolerant as tall fescue and the warm-season grasses, it is commonly used in northeastern Kansas, where there is sufficient annual rainfall. It is also grown under irrigation in northwestern Kansas where the higher elevation allows for cooler summer night temperatures.

The following cultivars have performed well compared to other bluegrasses in this region. Use this list as a guide. Omission does not necessarily mean that a cultivar will not perform well.

Recommended cultivars for high-quality lawns, where visual appearance is the prime concern, include Alexa II, Aura, Award, Bewitched, Barrister, Belissimo, Beyond, Diva, Everest, Everglade, Excursion, Ginney II, Granite, Impact, Midnight, NuChicago, NuGlade, NuDestiny, Rhapsody, Rhythm, Rugby, Skye, Solar Eclipse, STR 2485, Sudden Impact, Washington and Zifandel. Such lawns should receive 4 to 5 pounds nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year and would typically be irrigated during dry periods to prevent drought stress.

Cultivars that do relatively well under a low-maintenance program with limited watering often differ from those that do well under higher inputs. Good choices for low maintenance include Baron, Baronie, Caliber, Canterbury, Dragon, Eagleton, Enviecta, Kenblue, North Star, and South Dakota. Instead of the 4 to 5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year, low-maintenance
program would include 1 to 2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year. Obviously, a low-input lawn will not be as attractive as a higher-input lawn, but you can expect the cultivars listed above to look fairly good in the spring and fall, while going dormant in the summer. (WU)

**ORNAMENTALS**

**Dividing Daylilies**

Daylilies need to be divided every three to four years to maintain vigor. Though they may be divided in early spring before growth starts, it is more common to divide them at this time of year. Many gardeners cut back the tops to about half their original height to make plants easier to handle.

Daylilies have a very tough root system that can make them difficult to divide while in place. Dividing in place is practical if it hasn’t been long since the last division. In such cases, a spading fork can be used to peel fans from the existing clump. If the plants have been in place longer and are well grown together, it is more practical to divide them after the entire clump has been dug. Use a spade to lift the entire clump out of the ground. Although it is possible to cut the clump apart with a sharp spade, you'll save more roots by using two spading forks back-to-back to divide the clump into sections. Each section should be about the size of a head of cauliflower. An easier method involves using a stream of water from a garden hose to wash the soil from the clump, and then rolling the clump back and forth until the individual divisions separate.

Space divisions 24 to 30 inches apart, and set each at its original depth. The number of flowers will be reduced the first year after division but will return to normal until the plants need to be divided again. (WU)

**Lilacs with Dead Canes**

Lilac borers are insects whose larvae bore into stems usually during May and June. A sawdust-like material called frass is often seen around the base of stems after it has been pushed out the hole made by the borer. Canes often wilt and die during late summer especially if the summer has been dry. The larvae pass the winter inside the dead canes and pupates the following spring, usually during April. The adult, clear-winged moth resembles a wasp and often emerges during May through June though there is a great deal of variability. Eggs are laid on the stems of lilac, and the cycle starts over again. There is one generation in Kansas.

Though it is too late to spray for lilac borer this year, removal and destruction of dead canes will help reduce populations next year. You may also want to spray for the insect next spring. The first spray for ash/lilac borer should be applied when the Vanhoutte spirea is in full to late
bloom, probably by about May 1. A second spray should be applied four weeks after the first. Thoroughly treat the lower portion of the stem of lilac or privet. Permethrin (Hi-Yield 38 Plus and Hi-Yield Garden, Pet, and Livestock Insect Control) are labeled for control. Though there are a number of other homeowner products that contain permethrin, the products listed above are the only ones I've found that specify how the material should be applied for borer control on the label. (WU)

**FRUIT**

**Control Sooty Blotch and Fly Speck**

Apple cultivars that are three weeks or more from harvest may develop sooty blotch and fly speck on the fruit surface. Moderate temperatures, abundant rainfall and high humidity favor both diseases. Good pruning to facilitate drying is important in controlling the disease. An application or two of fungicide should prevent these fungus diseases from developing. Captan is an effective chemical control. (WU)

**When Are Apples Ready to Pick?**

We are receiving a number of questions about picking apples early. Though nearly mature apples can ripen off the tree, there must be a certain level of maturity for this to happen. Here are some guides to help you decide when to pick your apples.

**Color change:** As apples mature, the skin color in areas of the stem and the calyx basin at the bottom of the apple turns from an immature green to a light-yellow color. Some apples will develop a red skin color before they are ripe, so this is not a reliable indication of maturity.

**Flavor:** This is a good guide if you are familiar with the apples you have and know how they should taste. Even if you do not know the characteristic flavor of the kind of apple you have, you can still sample slices of a few apples and decide if they have a sweet flavor. If they are not ready to harvest, they will taste starchy or immature. If apples have already fallen and taste a bit starchy, store them for a period to see if they become sweeter.

**Flesh color:** As apples mature and starches change to sugars, the flesh changes from very light
green to white. When you cut a thin slice and hold it up to the light you can see the difference. **Days from bloom:** The number of days from bloom is a reliable guide for general maturity time, but weather conditions will have some influence. Some kinds of apples and approximate days from bloom to maturity are Jonathan, 135, Delicious, 145, Golden Delicious, 145, and Winesap, 155 days. Expect fruit to ripen more quickly than noted above due to the heat and drought. **Seed color:** The seeds of most apples change from light green to brown as the fruit ripens. This indicator should be combined with other changes since it is not absolute. The flavor of the apples, the change in color of the stem and calyx basins and flesh color are important in deciding if apples are ready to harvest. (WU)

**Fertilize Strawberries**

An August application of nitrogen on spring-bearing strawberries is important in order to increase the number of strawberries produced next spring. Plenty of daylight and warm temperatures during June, July and August promotes the growth of new runner, or daughter, plants. As daylight hours dwindle and temperatures grow cooler in September and October, fruit buds for the next year's fruit crop develop. To get a good berry crop next spring, it is important for strawberry plants to be vigorous during this period of fruit bud development. Nitrogen, applied mid August, will help promote fruit bud development. A general application rate is ½ to ¾ pound of actual nitrogen per 100 feet of row. The nitrogen may be in the form of a fertilizer mixture such as ammonium phosphate or 12-12-12, or in a fertilizer containing only nitrogen such as urea or ammonium nitrate. Some specific examples would include:

- Iron + (11-0-0) at 6 pounds per 100 feet of row.
- 12-12-12 at 5.5 pounds per 100 feet of row.
- Nitrate of Soda (16-0-0) at 4 pounds per 100 feet of row
- Ammonium sulfate (21-0-0) at 3 pounds per 100 feet of row
- Urea (46-0-0) at 1.5 pounds per 100 feet of row

On sandy soils, the rate may be increased by about a half. After spreading the fertilizer, sprinkle the area applying at least a half-inch of water to move the nitrogen into the strawberry root areas. (WU)

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**Overwatering Problems**

Plants can be helped through hot, dry conditions with timely watering. However, we have seen a significant amount of overwatering this year. Plant roots need oxygen just as much as they need water. Soils that become waterlogged have very little oxygen and roots can literally drown. Be sure to allow the soil to drain and begin to dry between deep waterings. (WU)
Contributors: Ward Upham, Extension Associate

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