Video of the Week:  Storing Tender Bulbs for the Winter

TURFGRASS

Should You Let Turf Grow Tall in the Fall?

Sometimes you will hear people say to let the grass grow tall right before winter sets in. Their reasoning is that the extra foliage will insulate the crown of the plant from the extreme cold of winter. Although this may sound reasonable, in practice it probably does little, if anything, to increase winter hardiness. On the contrary, a canopy that is too high during the winter may lay over and become matted down, leading to an increased incidence of winter-diseases such as snow mold.

Turfgrass species vary genetically in their cold tolerance, with warm-season grasses being less cold tolerant than the cool-season types. Given these differences, cold tolerance is improved by increasing the health of the plants going into the winter, and healthy plants are a result of a sound management program (fertilizing, watering and mowing) during the spring, summer and fall. The lawn will benefit more from continuing to mow at the recommended height than from trying to gain some insulation against winter cold by allowing it to grow tall.

Here is a list of the recommended mowing height ranges (in inches) for home lawns in Kansas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grass Type</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tall fescue</td>
<td>2.5 - 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky bluegrass</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perennial ryegrass</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalograss</td>
<td>2-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bermudagrass</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoysiagrass</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note: Mowing at heights below 1.5 inches requires a reel mower).
There may be some benefits gained by adjusting mowing heights WITHIN the recommended range at times. For example, it is a good practice to mow warm-season grasses at the higher end of recommended heights during late summer and early fall because this practice should help them store more carbohydrate reserves for the winter, and it may reduce the incidence of certain cool-weather diseases. But the rule to remember is to stay within the recommended height range for your species. (WU)

**Why Late Lawn Seedings Often Fail**

We normally recommend that Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue be seeded in September but no later than October 15. Though plantings later than October 15 can be successful, the odds of success diminish as time passes.

The problem with late plantings is not that the seed will not come up or that young grass plants are sensitive to cold. Most often, the problem is with rooting. Unless the young grass plants have a fairly extensive root system, the freezing and thawing that takes place during winter heaves plants out of the ground, and they dry out and die. Regardless of when planted, be sure the new lawn is kept watered through the fall. More mature lawns will need less frequent watering but all should go into the winter with moist soil. (WU)

**FLOWERS**

**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)
Winter Storage of Summer Bulbs

As winter approaches, we need to start thinking about storage of the bulbs that will not survive Kansas winters. The bulbs of gladiolus, caladium, dahlia, tuberous begonia, calla lily, and canna lily need to be dug and stored so they can be planted next year. Actually, the storage organ of the above plants is not a true bulb. Canna and calla lilies are rhizomes, caladium, and tuberous begonias are tubers, gladiolus is a corm, and dahlia is a tuberous rooted plant. All of these plants should be dug after frost has browned the foliage. Then, allow them to dry for about a week in a shady, well-ventilated site such as a garage or tool shed. Remove any excess soil and pack them in peat moss, vermiculite, or perlite. Make sure the bulbs don’t touch so that if one decays, the rot doesn’t spread. Dusting them with fungicide before storage will help prevent them from rotting.

Caladium should be stored between 50 and 60 degrees F. The other bulbs mentioned should be stored near 40 degrees F. Finding a good spot to store the bulbs may be difficult. Some people place them against a basement wall farthest from the furnace and insulate them so the wall keeps them cool. (WU)

FRUIT

Reproducing Apple Trees

Every so often we receive a question about how to make apple seeds germinate. Often, the person is looking for a way to reproduce an apple tree that is dying. Unfortunately, apple trees do not come true from seed. In other words, the apple seed produces trees that differ from the parent. It is extremely unlikely that any apple produced from seed will bear quality fruit. About one in every 80,000 apple seedlings will produce commercial quality fruit.

So how do you reproduce an apple that is like the parent? The most common way is by grafting. Grafting is a procedure that joins two plants together. The upper part (or scion) becomes the top part of the tree, while the lower part (or stock) provides the root system or part of the trunk. Apples are relatively easy to graft. How to graft is beyond the scope of this newsletter, but local libraries should have materials that cover the procedure, or you can find an excellent publication on the web at http://muextension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/agguides/hort/g06971.pdf (WU)

Contributors: Ward Upham, Extension Associate
To view Upcoming Events:  http://tinyurl.com/fswqe

The web version includes color images that illustrate subjects discussed. To subscribe to this newsletter electronically, send an e-mail message to cdipman@ksu.edu or wupham@ksu.edu listing your e-mail address in the message.

For questions or further information contact:  wupham@ksu.edu

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only. No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

“Knowledge for Life”
Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service