Horticulture 2013 Newsletter
No. 42   October 22, 2013

Video of the Week:  Storing Tender Bulbs for the Winter

TURFGRASS

Control Broadleaf Weeds in Lawns in Late October - Early November

Late October to early November is the most effective time to control broadleaf weeds in lawns. Dandelions usually produce a flush of new plants in late September, and the winter annual weeds henbit and chickweed should have germinated in October. These young plants are small and easily controlled with herbicides such as 2,4-D or combination products (Trimec, Weed-B-Gon, Weed-Out) that contain 2,4-D, MCPP and Dicamba. Even established dandelions are more easily controlled now than in the spring because they are actively moving materials from the top portion of the plant to the roots. Herbicides will translocate to the roots as well and will kill the plant from the roots up.

Choose a day that is 50 degrees or higher. The better the weed is growing, the more weed killer will be moved from the leaves to the roots. Cold temperatures will slow or stop this process.

Weed Free Zone (also sold under the name of Speed Zone) contains the three active ingredients mentioned above, plus carfentrazone. It will give a quicker response than the other products mentioned especially as temperatures approach 50 degrees. (Ward Upham)

Tucking Your Lawnmower in for the Winter

If you are done mowing for the year, be sure to service your mower before putting it away. Make sure you drain the gas tank of gasoline-powered engines or use a gasoline stabilizer. Untreated gasoline can become thick and gummy. A few drops of oil squirted inside the spark plug hole (after you remove the spark plug) will help lubricate the cylinder. While you have the spark
plug removed, replace it with a new one.

If your equipment has a battery, clean the battery terminals, which usually corrode during the season. A wire-bristle brush is a good tool for doing this. The battery can then be removed or connected to a battery monitor that will keep it charged over winter. If you remove the battery, be sure to store it in a protected location for the winter (a cool basement works best).

Now is also an excellent time to sharpen mower blades so they'll be ready next spring. Sharpening rotary mower blades is fairly straightforward. The following steps will guide you through this process:

* Check the blade for major damage. If you can't fix it, it likely will need to be replaced.
* Remove grass and debris from the blade with a moist cloth. Dry before beginning to sharpen the cutting edge.
* Remove nicks from the cutting edge, using a grinding wheel or hand-file.
* If using a grinding wheel, match the existing edge angle to the wheel. If hand-filing, file at the same angle as the existing edge.
* Grind or file until the edge is 1/32 inch, about the size of a period.
* Particularly with a grinding wheel, avoid overheating the blade as this may warp it.
* Clean the blade with solvent or oil, much like if you were cleaning a gun, for optimum winter storage. Avoid using water because it will promote rust.

Following these tips can help you better prepare your mower for winter storage and also save you some steps this coming spring. (Ward Upham)

**VEGETABLES**

**Hardiness of Cool-Season Vegetables**

Cool-season vegetables vary in cold tolerance, with some able to take colder temperatures than others.

Semi-hardy crops can take a light frost but are damaged by temperatures in the mid- to upper-20s. Examples include beets, Chinese cabbage, collards, Irish potatoes, Bibb lettuce, mustard, radishes, spinach, Swiss chard, and leaf lettuce. Covering these plants when cold weather threatens can help extend the harvest season.

Plants termed “hardy” can take lower temperatures but are damaged when the temperature drops to the low 20s. These include cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, carrots, turnips, and kale.

Certain root crops can essentially be stored outside even after the leaves have been damaged or killed by frost. Beets, carrots, potatoes and turnips can be mulched and harvested as needed until the soil starts to freeze in late November to December.
Growing vegetables in Kansas can be a challenge, but we have an extremely long gardening season. We can harvest from early April (asparagus) to early December. Winter is a good time to plan and prepare for next year’s crops. (Ward Upham)

**ORNAMENTALS**

**Tree Leaves and Turf**

It's that time of year again. Leaves are rapidly falling from deciduous trees so it's a good time to stop and think about options for handling the litter. Although a scattering of leaves won’t harm the lawn, excessive cover prevents sunlight from reaching turfgrass plants.

Turf left in this state for an extended period will be unable to make the carbohydrates needed to carry it through the winter.

There are options for dealing with the fallen leaves other than bagging them up and putting them out for the trash collector. Composting is a great way to handle the refuse. Compost can then be used in the vegetable garden and flowerbeds. If you do not compost, you can mow leaves with a mulching mower and let shredded leaves filter into the turf canopy. (A side-discharge mower also will work, but it won't shred the leaves as thoroughly.) This method will be most effective if you do it often enough that leaf litter doesn’t become too thick. Mow while you can still see grass peeking through the leaves.

You may wonder whether this practice will be detrimental to the lawn in the long run. Research at Michigan State University in which they used a mulching mower to shred up to about one pound of leaves per square yard of lawn (one pound is equal to approximately 6 inches of leaves piled on the grass) for five consecutive years, found no long-term effects of the shredded leaves on turf quality, thatch thickness, organic content of the thatch, or soil test results (pH, nutrients, etc.). If you mow leaves and have a cool-season lawn, it makes sense to be on a fall nitrogen fertilization program and core-aerate in the fall (things you should be doing anyway). If you have a warm-season lawn, you can still use this technique but wait to fertilize and core-aerate until next late May or early June. (Ward Upham)

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**Preserving Garden Tools**

Hoes, shovels and other common garden tools often have wooden handles that can deteriorate over time. Storing tools in a protected location can slow that process, but normal use will still expose the tools to the elements. The end of the season is a good time to clean up and
protect the handles so they will last for many years. Weathering can raise the grain of wood, resulting in splinters. A light sanding can smooth the handle. Follow that with a light application of wood preservative, linseed oil or polyurethane to protect the wood. Wipe off any excess after a few minutes as oil-based products can attract dirt. Cleaning any dirt off metal parts and coating with a light application of oil can prevent rust. Good tools are expensive. A few minutes of care after the season is over can help preserve them for many years to come. (Ward Upham)

**Contributors:** Ward Upham, Extension Associate