TURFGRASS

Power Raking and Core Aeration

September is the optimum time to power rake or core aerate tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass lawns. These grasses should be coming out of their summer doldrums and beginning to grow more vigorously. This is a good time to reconsider what we are trying to accomplish with these practices. Power raking is primarily a thatch control operation. It can be excessively damaging to the turf if not done carefully. For lawns with one half inch of thatch or less, I don't recommend power raking. For those who are unsure what thatch is, it is a springy layer of light brown organic matter that resembles peat moss and is located above the soil but below the grass foliage. Tall fescue lawns rarely have much thatch. Kentucky bluegrass lawns, however, are much more prone to building up a thick thatch layer.

Core aeration is a much better practice for most lawns. By removing cores of soil, core aeration relieves compaction, hastens thatch decomposition, and improves water, nutrient, and oxygen movement into the soil profile. This operation should be performed when the soil is just moist enough so that it crumbles easily when worked between the fingers. Enough passes should be made so that the holes are spaced about 2 to 3 inches apart. Ideally, the holes should penetrate 2.5 to 3 inches deep. The cores can be left on the lawn to decompose naturally (a process that usually takes two or three weeks, depending on soil type), or they can be broken up with a vertical mower set just low enough to nick the cores, and then dragged with a section of chain link fence or a steel doormat. The intermingling of soil and thatch is beneficial to the lawn. (Ward Upham)

Little Barley in Lawns
Many people mistake little barley (Hordeum pusillum) for a little foxtail because the foxtail and little barley seedheads are similar. However, little barley is a winter annual that comes up in late September - October and spends the winter as a small plant. It thrives in the cooler spring temperatures, forms seed heads and dies out usually by July. Foxtail, on the other hand, is a summer annual that does well in hot weather. Also, foxtail will not produce seedheads until mid- to late-summer.

So why are we talking about little barley now? Because now is the time to control it for next year.

The best control for little barley is a thick lawn that is mowed high enough that sunlight does not hit the soil. Little barley seed will not germinate in such conditions. Overseeding now can thicken up a tall fescue lawn and prevent a little barley infestation. However, if you do not plan to overseed, preemergence herbicides can be used to provide at least partial control of this weed.

The only preemergence herbicide that I know is labeled specifically for little barley is Surflan. It is also sold under the name of Weed Impede by Monterey Lawn and Garden. Surflan can only be used on warm-season grasses (bermudagrass, buffalograss, zoysiagrass) and tall fescue grown in warm-season areas such as Kansas. However, Dimension (dithiopyr), is labeled for barley (Herodium spp.) which would include little barley and therefore can be used to keep this weed under control. Because little barley is a winter annual, apply the preemergence herbicide in September and water in to activate. If overseeding, do not apply any preemergence herbicide as it will interfere with the germination of tall fescue. (Ward Upham)

**ORNAMENTALS**

**Trees Coloring Early**

We are seeing a number of trees, especially maples, that are showing fall colors early. Often it is not the whole tree but sections. As a rule, we consider early coloration as bad news as it often means the tree is under a great deal of stress. However, this year, many of the trees showing coloration look perfectly healthy. We think what has happened is the trees have come through a very mild and moist summer through much of the state and never hardened off to hot temperatures. Now that the weather has changed, the tree is simply entering dormancy early. The tree has had plenty of time to store the energy reserves it needs to survive the winter.

So, do we need to do anything? Yes, we do. Keep the soil moist as many trees have had root systems damaged from the last couple of years. We need to give that root system time to recover. This is especially important for areas that are still experiencing drought or have had so much rain that soils were saturated. Lack of oxygen from saturated soils is just as damaging to a root system as lack of water. (Ward Upham)
FRUIT

Storing Apples

You can enjoy apples from January to June – with the right conditions. Some apple cultivars can be stored for longer periods than others. Some cultivars will stay in firm, crisp condition for about 6 to 8 months with good storage conditions. The approximate length of time cultivars will keep well under refrigerated conditions are as follows:

- Wealthy: 60 days
- Paulared: 90 days
- Gala: 120 days
- Jonathan: 120 days
- Grimes Golden: 120 days
- Golden Delicious: 150 days
- Empire: 150 days
- Delicious: 160 days
- Braeburn: 180 days
- Idared: 200 days
- Rome Beauty: 220 days
- Winesap: 220 days
- Fuji: 240 days
- Granny Smith: 240 days
- Arkansas Black: 240 days

The condition of the apples and how they are stored will strongly influence the storage period. Some guidelines to help assure good quality and maximum storage life of apples include:

* Store only the best quality.
* Pick as they are first maturing.
* Avoid skin breaks, disease or insect damage, and bruises on individual fruit.
* Store in a plastic bag to help retain moisture in the apples. The bag should have a few small holes for air exchange. The bags of apples may be stored in boxes to prevent bruising if they must be stacked or moved from time to time.
* Refrigerate at about 35 degrees F. An extra refrigerator works well.
* Sort about every 30 to 40 days to remove fruit that may be beginning to rot. (Ward Upham)
FLOWERS

Planting Fall Containers

It’s finally time to plant fall containers! I’ve waited and waited to get some purple fountain grass (Pennisetum setaceum ‘Rubrum’) for a half-empty container garden at my house. I had planted a leftover research plant in the container earlier this summer and since the plant was already having problems, it never recovered despite my eternal optimism. My husband finally said, “Chuck it. Even I can see it doesn’t have a chance.” He was right, of course, but it’s been such a whirlwind summer for me that I haven’t had time to replant. My plan was always the purple fountain grass, though. It’s a perfect accent for fall plantings and the seed heads keep it interesting for a long time during the cold months. Keep in mind that purple fountain grass is an annual in this part of the country (it won’t come back next year), but it sure is a nice one.

I got a chance to go shopping at the garden center last weekend. I wasn’t sure what to expect since the weather has been so strange this year. In fact, Cody Flaherty, a nurseryman at Plants for All Seasons in Houston, Texas coined a new term for the weather this year: “Sprummer.” Nice, right? Don’t count on it happening again next year, but we can all dream. This year, my pansies lasted all the way into June. By then, the new annuals had been picked over and there were fewer choices (I can always find the gems, though). Now that it’s time to think about fall containers, my summer annuals are really looking good. My solution? Buy more pots. The mums are looking so great right now and selection is at a premium. It had to be done.

I was pleasantly surprised at the selection of colorful plants available at the garden center. Not only had appropriate fall plant choices been massed on benches at the front of the greenhouse, but the staff had been hard at work potting up some absolutely beautiful fall-themed container combinations. As always, it was a little slice of heaven for this plant lover. If you’re stretched for time and/or creativity, these do-it-for-me solutions are lifesavers. If you’re more of the Inspire-me-and-let-me-go-at-it type, then by all means, prepare for some fun.

Great plants for fall container gardens are listed below (mix and match at least 3 per container). Try to choose something tall, something that trails and a filler plant (or two). Pop a pumpkin next to it and you are good to go!

* Asparagus fern
* Aster
* Chrysanthemum (mum)
* Coleus
* Fennel
* Ivy
* Lettuce or mustard plants
* Marigold
* Mille
* Ornamental cabbage (kale)
* Ornamental corn
* Ornamental grass
* Ornamental peppers
* Pansies
* Vinca

I ended up buying 3 mums (purple, white and flamingo pineapple—who wouldn’t want a cultivar with a name like that?!). Time will tell if I can resist going back. My other difficult choice at the garden center this time: big pot—or—little pot … of purple fountain grass. Oh, the challenges of being a gardener.

Bring on fall! (Cheryl Boyer)

**MISCELLANEOUS**

**Harvesting and Roasting Sunflower Seed**

Sunflowers are usually ready to be harvested beginning in mid-September and into October. Seed heads can ripen on the plant, but they will need protection from birds. Try covering the heads with a paper sack or cheesecloth once the petals start turning brown. Use a twist tie or rubber band to secure the covering. This will not only help keep birds out but will prevent ripened seeds from dropping out of the head.

Check for maturity by looking for the following signs:

- Florets in the brown center of the flower disk should be shriveled.
- Heads should have turned down.
- The backside of the head should be lemon yellow.

The ultimate check, of course, is to pull a few seeds to see if they have turned black with white stripes, the typical color. Empty shells usually indicate a lack of pollination earlier in the year. If heads are to remain uncovered, harvest when a few seeds start turning black and white. The flavor will not be good as when seeds are allowed to ripen on the plants, but fewer seeds will be lost.

Cut the heads and place in a paper sack. Some people prefer to cut the heads with about a foot of stem attached and hang them upside down in a dry, well-ventilated area. A paper bag or cheesecloth can be placed over the heads to prevent seeds from dropping as they dry. Seeds can be easily removed from dry heads by rubbing gently.

**Roasting Seeds**

Raw, mature seeds may be prepared at home by covering unshelled seeds with salted water (2
quarts of water to 1/4 to 2 cup salt). Bring to a boil and simmer 2 hours, or soak in the salt solution overnight. Drain and dry on absorbent paper.

Put sunflower seeds in a shallow pan in a 300-degree F oven for 30 to 40 minutes or until golden brown, stirring occasionally. Take seeds out of the oven and add 1 teaspoon of melted butter or margarine, or cooking oil per 1 cup of seeds if they are to be eaten immediately. Stir to coat. Put on an absorbent towel. Salt to taste. (Ward Upham)

**Organic Sources of Nitrogen Fertilizers**

Most of the soil tests we receive for vegetable gardens are high in phosphorus and potassium leaving nitrogen as the nutrient needed most. However, many of our organic fertilizers contain similar amounts of all three nutrients. So what can we use that provides more nitrogen than phosphorus and potassium? Following is a short list of such fertilizers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Pounds /100 sq. ft.</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blood Meal</td>
<td>12-0-0</td>
<td>5 - 10</td>
<td>Can burn plants if overapplied.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottonseed Meal</td>
<td>6-0.4-1.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>May have pesticide carryover unless labeled as pesticide-free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soybean Meal</td>
<td>7-2-1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feed stores will often sell these products. Colorado State University has an excellent publication on organic fertilizers at [http://cmg.colostate.edu/gardennotes/234.pdf](http://cmg.colostate.edu/gardennotes/234.pdf). (Ward Upham)

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