**Fall Lawn Care**

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This is a strange year for the lawn. Most lawns are in relatively good shape despite the low level of the aquifer and the resultant drought restrictions. Rainfall overall has been above average in the San Antonio area. Low rainfall levels and high agricultural water use west of the city are the main causes of low aquifer levels.

The situation means that the care you provide to your grass this fall should take advantage of the healthy state of the lawns but also be sensitive to drought restrictions.

On or about October 1 is when the lawns should receive an application of winterizer fertilizer. Winterizer fertilizer is usually in a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen to phosphorous to potassium. Two common formulas are 15-5-10 and 18-6-12.

Fertilizer applied now does not contribute to heavy top growth because the cooler weather and changing day length has moved the grass into a storage mode. The nutrients are taken into the grass plant and organized in a pattern to provide the roots and crown cold weather protection. The stored nutrients also contribute to a fast green-up in the spring

Winterizing fertilizer can be applied and utilized by the grass as long as it is green. Sometimes in a mild winter, that means through November.

It is usually advisable to reduce watering the lawn in the fall because less is needed with the diminished growth rate and because a lawn in the autumn is susceptible to brown patch.

Brown patch develops in lawns with low spots that remain wet into the night. To prevent the disease it is best to reduce total irrigation and shift the watering to early morning. With lawn watering limited to once per week and with relatively dry soil, brown patch should not be as much of a problem this fall as it is in rainy autumns.

Most of us prefer to quit watering the lawn at all in the fall, but St. Augustine should not be allowed to go without moisture for more than a month. Zoysia, Bermuda and buffalo grass can go dormant in dry or cold periods but St. Augustine does not have that capability.

Last year after the dry hot summer the lawns were not very thick, and when the rains finally did begin, it was a banner year for weeds. Bedstraw, thistle, annual bluegrass, rescue grass, henbit, wild carrot and beggar’s lice filled every inch of many landscapes.

One way to reduce the weed crop is to apply a pre-emergent herbicide. It would have been best if it had been applied about September 1, but it will still do a good job if it is applied as early as possible in October.

The products Amaze and XL are good herbicides to prevent both grassy weeds and broadleafs, but two separate herbicides could be applied. Portrait is good for preventing their germination of broadleaf weeds and one of the several crabgrass preventive products does well to prevent the grasses. Review the labels thoroughly before you purchase the products and again before you apply them. They will be effective for reducing weeds and will be safe for desirable plants like the lawn as long as you use the right product and follow the instructions on the label for application.

If you have summer weeds now, do your best to prevent them from maturing a crop of seed. The easiest way to prevent seed production is to mow the weeds in the lawn and pull the weeds in the garden.

Sand burs are of special interest. The plants with the burs intact can often be popped out of the ground with a shovel tip. Sack up the plants and dispose of them in the garbage to reduce the reseeding potential for next year.

If “popping” the plants is not practical for your situation, the burs can be collected by dragging a carpet remnant over the area. The carpet catches many of the burs so that they don’t end up in your pets’ feet or as a seed source for next summerr.