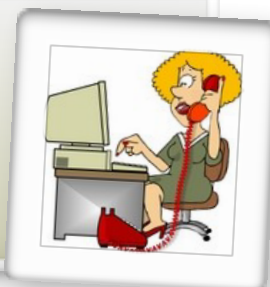


From the Bedford VCE Master Gardener

HELP DESK



March 2014 *A monthly newsletter column for Bedford Extension Master Gardeners*
Now available at the BAMGA website for interested gardeners, like you! Editor: LindaE

March brings lengthening daylight hours, warming day-time temperatures, and perennials peeking slowly up through the ground. It also brings us the start of spring – either meteorological (March 1) or astronomical (March 20). It also brings us the start of daylight savings time on March 9. [1] [2] {3}

Thus, the challenges of another growing season will soon be upon us. We, like our horticultural community clients, soon will be double checking our plants for anything amiss, and might just see something strange. If the answer does not immediately come to mind you and our clients will probably mutter something to the effect of “What in the Heck is THAT!?” That’s where the VCE Master Gardener Help Desk comes into play. With the availability of our resources Help Desk volunteers are able to assist the not only the home gardener but also, from time to time, other master gardeners with their horticulture questions.

So, to get our ‘sleuthing brain’s’ going again, I have included a few questions that have come into the VCE Office MG Help Desk in March within the past few years. Do the answers come immediately to you? If not, continue reading for the answers elsewhere in the Newsletter. And if you are really curious, please consider volunteering for the Help Desk; it is a good place to continue your learning!

QUESTIONS

1. This question came in early March a few years ago. The client asked:
“Is mulch from oak tree leaves okay to use?”
2. We received a call in early March 2011, during the recent dry years, from a client who explained that his lawn was dying, and that he had people lined up to reseed it. He wanted to know the “best mix of seed recommended for my area.” (Forest, VA)
3. We received the following call on March 1, 2012 when the year started out unseasonably warm with daytime temperatures climbing well into the 70’s. The client stated he had “planted this year’s onions seeds about 1 month ago. They are not germinating yet. What did I do wrong”?



ANSWERS

1. When deciding whether to use leaves for mulch, it is a good idea to identify whether they are acidic, (oak), alkaline (maple), neutral, or are toxic or harmful to surrounding plants (walnut). Identifying these characteristics will aid in understanding how these leaves can impact plants or soil onto which they are placed. [4] Diseased leaves and/or plants should not be used as mulch; rather they should be gathered up and removed from the garden.

Once you have determined which leaves can be used where, they should be properly prepared prior to placement. According to the VCE article Springtime Mulching “Leaves . . . should be partially rotted, shredded, and dried before being used, because large leaves that are not rotted can form heavy mats and cause issues with water and air infiltration. They can also trap water underneath; causing a wet environment that fosters decay and fungus....” [5]

In addition, leaves that are not properly prepared may “harbor diseases, insects, rodents, and weed seeds. And finally, care should be taken not to shred the leaves too finely nor layered too deeply; “[T]he smaller the mulch particle size and the thicker the mulch layer, the greater the possibility of weed growth in the mulch layer. Aim for 2”-4” of settle depth (more for larger particles, less for smaller)....” [4]

2. The first thing anybody should do before reseeding their lawn is to get representative soil samples, send them to Virginia Tech for testing, and follow the recommendations provided in the test results report. The climate in the Virginia can be difficult on both cool-season grasses (Kentucky blue-grass, tall fescue) as well as warm-season grasses (bermudagrass, zoysiagrass), depending on your location. Virginia is considered to be in the transition zone for turfgrasses [6]. This especially true in Bedford where the eastern sections can be considered to be in the Piedmont physiographic province while the western sections are in the Blue Ridge. [7] In this instance, the client was informed about the value of soil testing as well as the variables in climate for the county and how that impacts turfgrass selections. We mailed out the following articles [8] [6] [9] [10] [11]:



- Virginia Turfgrass Variety Recommendations. VCE Publication CSES_17
- Establishing Lawns. VCE Publication #426-718
- Home Lawn Fertilization in Virginia: Frequently Asked Questions. VCE Publication #430-003
- Maintenance Calendar for Cool-Season Turfgrasses in Virginia. VCE Publication #430-523
- Maintenance Calendar for Warm-Season Turfgrasses in Virginia. VCE Publication #430-522

3. The client was advised that he had planted his onion seeds too early and that even though the day-time temperatures were warm, the soil temperatures had not warmed up sufficiently for planting. During development soil temperatures should be between 45 and 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Outside planting should be no earlier than the last week of March to the first week of May. If germinating the seeds inside, do not start seeds until eight (8) weeks before planting. After germination, plants can be brought out during warm days, but should be inside at night. Always check the seed packet for correct planting depth. [12]

REFERENCES

- [1] <http://glossary.ametsoc.org/wiki/Spring> (accessed Feb 21, 2014 @ 10:49AM)
- [2] <http://www.almanac.com/content/first-day-spring-vernal-equinox> (accessed Feb 21, 2014 @ 10:50AM)
- [3] http://aa.usno.navy.mil/faq/docs/daylight_time.php (accessed Feb 21, 2014 @10:51AM)
- [4] "Selections and Uses of Mulches and Landscape Fabrics"
http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-019/430-019_pdf.pdf
- [5] "Springtime Mulching" http://www.anr.ext.vt.edu/lawnandgarden/turfandgardentips/tips/Springtime_mulch.html
- [6] "Establishing Lawns" <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-718/426-718.html>
- [7] *Flora of Virginia*, Alan S. Weakley, J. Christopher Ludwig, John F. Townsend, November, 2012
- [8] "Virginia Turfgrass Variety Recommendations"
http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/CSES/CSES-17/CSES-17_pdf.pdf
- [9] "Home Lawn Fertilization in Virginia: Frequently Asked Questions" <http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-003/430-003.html>
- [10] "Maintenance Calendar for Cool-Season Turfgrasses in Virginia" http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-523/430-523_pdf.pdf
- [11] "Maintenance Calendar for Warm-Season Turfgrasses in Virginia" http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-522/430-522_pdf.pdf
- [12] "Onions, Garlic, and Shallots"
<http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/426/426-411/426-411.html>

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The answers provided herein were based on specific situations and growing conditions. These recommendations may or may not be appropriate for all circumstances. For specific recommendations for your particular situation please contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

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Websites: www.BedfordMasterGardeners.org and <http://offices.ext.vt.edu/bedford/>



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