



## ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM/ LIMESTONE COUNTY OFFICE

### The Garden Spot For Week of September 14, 2009

#### Treat Lawns in Fall to Prevent Winter Weeds

Even though Labor Day weekend often signals the end of summer, the approaching fall season is an excellent time to prepare the lawn for the winter months and give it a jump start on next spring. The next few weeks are the prime time to do several things:

**Fertilize.** Fertilizer may be applied to cool-season grasses during the fall. Of course it is best to fertilize according to soil test results, but if a soil test has not been done, then fertilize according to nitrogen needs. Fescues generally require 0.1 - 0.5 lbs. of nitrogen/1000 ft<sup>2</sup>/growing month. Therefore, apply nitrogen at this rate in October and November. Remember, though, that the more nitrogen that is added, the more often the lawn will need to be mowed, and if too much nitrogen is used, the chances for disease attack increases.

There isn't too much that needs to be done at this time to the warm-season grasses. These grasses shouldn't be fertilized after August, however, a pre-emergent herbicide may be applied before the second week of October.

#### **Herbicide application**

Fall is a very good time to look at weed control, especially using pre-emergence products.

**Preemergence treatments** are applied before weeds sprout from seeds. Apply two weeks ahead of germination. For North Alabama, the ideal time to apply them is in early October. If you put these out too early, less effective control may be expected (i.e. more than a month before seed germination). Applications should not be made until excess lawn clippings and leaf litter are removed. Homeowners will find many over the counter preemergence

products at local garden centers for control of summer annual weeds. Many are often referred to as “crabgrass preventor.” They are available in both liquid and granular forms.

Be sure to follow label recommendations for application rates and watering requirements. Crabgrass preventors, for control of summer annual grasses, require water or rainfall to activate.

**Fertilizer-herbicide combinations** are extremely popular because they combine two operations. Combinations with preemergence chemicals are generally effective since both fertilizer and herbicide action are dependent on contact with the soil (requiring rainfall or irrigation). Postemergence herbicide action depends more on absorption by leaves, and granules in such combinations do not adhere well to smooth-surfaced leaves. They will stick better if applied when weed leaves are damp, perhaps with morning dew. Keep in mind that “Weed and feed” materials sometimes present a conflict in desirable actions. Proper time for weed control often does not coincide with the most desirable time and rates for fertilizing. If used for follow-up fertilizations, there is danger of herbicide overdose.

If you wait until after the weeds appear, you will need to apply **post-emergence products**. A fall application of post-emergence products is often successful because many of perennial broadleaf weeds are rapidly growing in the early fall. By applying in the fall, there is generally less risk of injury to desired plants and both perennial and winter annual seedlings can be controlled. Also, perennials weakened by herbicide may be killed by winter weather.

Although most herbicides are formulated with reliable safety factors, application rates higher than those recommended may cause injury to turf and ornamental plants. Many people overapply herbicides, especially when using fertilizer-herbicide combinations. The user needs to follow instructions on containers carefully to avoid overdoses.

Invest some time into your yard: Proper fertilizing, watering, and mowing practices will provide a healthy lawn year-round.

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