



ALABAMA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM/ LIMESTONE COUNTY OFFICE

The Garden Spot For week of May 18, 2009

Rains are Causing Challenges in Home Gardens & Yards

A month ago, we welcomed the fresh spring rains. But over the last couple of weeks, we've gone from a multiple-year drought situation to having too much water in our yards and gardens. Because of this bountiful rainfall, home gardeners are being met with a different set of challenges than we've seen in the last few years.

First of all, many folks are still waiting on drier conditions just to plant their gardens. Especially in lower areas, gardens have simply been too wet to plant. Don't worry, garden centers still have plenty of plants and there's still time to plant summer vegetables. It's too late to start cool-season vegetables, but plan on trying those cool-season vegetables in a fall garden.

Both garden and yard soils are supersaturated. Add the high number of cloudy and overcast days; the soils have not dried out when there has not been rain. Plants are wilting and even dying because the roots are not able to function properly due to the lack of life-sustaining oxygen in the soil. This damage can appear suddenly or show up more slowly, as is usually the case with large plants such as trees. Poor root health can be a chronic problem in areas with poor drainage. Plants often grow poorly and have leaves that are abnormally yellow.

Wet weather also seems to invite diseases and pests to yards and gardens. As a result, look for plants to be infected by root rotting fungi or such diseases as

phytopthera root rot. Soil- borne fungi remain inactive in the soil for long periods of time. They become stimulated by cool, wet conditions and then attack plants.

While the wet weather seems to be detrimental to our vegetables and good grasses, it seems that dampness is like fertilizer to weeds. Weeds are growing full-blast; gardeners will need to work overtime to keep them under control during this period of rapid growth.

Be careful about tilling. Soils are tilled to prepare a good seedbed and to control weeds. A soil with good structure needs minimum tilling. When it is tilled, it is nice and crumbly (good tilth). Excessive tilling can actually result in the destruction of soil structure and in more soil compaction. This is especially true if soils are tilled when they are too wet. If you are thinking about tilling, pick up a handful of soil from your garden. Close your hand around the soil; if it stays in a ball-shape (does not crumble), it is too wet to till.

In yards, some of the warm-season grasses, such as Bermudagrass and zoysiagrass, have been slower to green up because of the wet, overcast, and cooler conditions. These grasses demand warm (even hot) temperatures, which they simply have not had on an extended basis this spring.

Don't forget the trees. As we have already seen over the past few weeks, trees are more apt to topple during strong winds because of the wet, softer soil.

Other than being alert to the damp conditions, there's really nothing gardeners can proactively do other than wait for things to dry out. And by all means, turn off the sprinklers!

If you have questions on home gardening or related topics, remember that the Limestone County Master Gardeners have a 'HelpLine' on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. They are highly trained and willing to help with your home gardening and home grounds questions. Their phone number is 232-5510 and they are located in an office at the Limestone County Extension Office at 1109 W. Market Street in Athens.

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