

Horticulture 2013 Newsletter No. 48 December 3, 2013

Video of the Week: [Poinsettias, Choosing the Best](#)

TURFGRASS

Dormant Seeding of Turfgrass



The best time to seed cool-season grasses such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass is September because the turf has more time to mature before spring crabgrass germination and the heat stress of summer. Dormant seeding of turfgrass is sometimes used to help fill in bare spots of lawns that weren't overseeded in the fall. Dormant overseeding is done during the winter (December – February) when it is much too cold for germination.

As with any seeding program, good seed-soil contact is vital. Several methods can be used. One method is to seed when there has been a light snowfall of up to an inch. This is shallow enough that bare spots can still be seen. Spread seed by hand on areas that need thickening up. As the snow melts, it brings the seed into good contact with the soil where it will germinate in the spring.

Another method is dependent on the surface of the soil being moist followed by some freezing weather. As moist soil freezes and thaws, small pockets are formed on the wet, bare soil that is perfect for catching and holding seed. As the soil dries, the pockets collapse and cover the seed.

A third method involves core aerating, verticutting or hand raking and broadcasting seed immediately after. Of course, the soil must be dry enough and unfrozen for this to be practical. With any of the above methods, seed germinates in the spring as early as possible. There will be limitations on what herbicides can be used for weed control. Tupersan (siduron) can be used as a crabgrass preventer on new seedings even before they have come up. Also dithiopyr, found in Hi-Yield Turf and Ornamental Weed and Grass Stopper, can be used on tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and perennial ryegrass two weeks after germination. Dithiopyr is longer lasting and more effective than siduron. Other preemergence herbicides require that the turf be well established before application. (Ward Upham)

FRUIT

Mouse Damage to Fruit Trees/Plants



Be on the lookout for mouse tunnels around your fruit plants. Trunks and roots of apple trees are among the favorite meals for mice. There is probably no damage yet. But if we receive enough snow to cover winter food supplies, mice will begin to feed on the lower area of tree trunks and roots. This feeding may be severe enough to girdle tree trunks and kill the trees.

Mice like to hide in dead grass and weeds around the trees, especially close to the trunks. They will often tunnel near the soil surface and feed on the tree bark. You can check for mice by placing baited mouse traps in PVC or other pipe near your trees. Insert the traps far enough so that pets are unable to reach the trap. Check the stations about once a week and reset traps if necessary.

Mouse damage can be severe enough to kill trees that are old enough to bear fruit. Clear dead grass and weeds away from your trees and monitor for mice if you are using mulch around your fruit plants. (Ward Upham)

MISCELLANEOUS

Using Old Garden Seed



Seed catalogs seem to come earlier every year, and many gardeners already have begun to receive them. Garden seed can be expensive, and you may want to consider using seed from previous years. Seed stores best if kept in a cool, dark, dry location. Try a zip-locked plastic bag or a plastic jar such as a reused peanut butter jar to keep seed dry.

Seed will be viable longer if kept between 40 and 50 degrees F. Temperatures a bit lower than 40 degrees are fine as long as they are not sub-freezing. Therefore a refrigerator is a better choice than a freezer which can prove detrimental to seed longevity if there is too much moisture in the seed. Seed that has 8% or less moisture can be frozen without harm and will actually store much longer than seed stored above freezing. Seeds dried to 8% or less moisture will break instead of bending when folded. Those that have a hard seed coat such as corn and beans will shatter rather than mashing when struck with a hammer.

If your seed is not dry enough for freezing, what should you do? The easiest answer is to store

your seed under cool (not freezing) conditions. Drying seeds is a rather involved process and beyond the scope of this article. However, if you would like to try, an excellent reference on an effective procedure is given in the book “Seed to Seed” by Suzanne Ashworth.

Crop groups vary in seed longevity. Use the following as a guide for seed stored under cool, dry conditions.

- Crucifers (cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli): 4 to 5 years
- Corn: 2 to 3 years
- Lettuce, endive: 4 to 5 years
- Spinach, beets, carrots and chard: 2 to 3 years
- Cucurbits: Squash, melons (including watermelon): 4 to 5 years
- Tomatoes: 4 years
- Peppers: 2 years
- Onion, parsley, parsnip and salsify: 1 year

If you are unsure of viability and have plenty of seed, there is an easy method of determining how good your seed is. Place 10 seeds on a paper towel moistened with warm water and cover with a second moistened towel. Roll up the towels and place inside a plastic bag with enough holes for air exchange but not so many that the towels dry quickly. Place the bag in a warm place such as the top of a refrigerator. Remoisten towels with warm water as needed. After the first week, check for germination. Remove sprouted seed and check again after another week. Add these numbers together to determine the percent germination. (Ward Upham)

Firewood



Not all firewood is created equal. Some species of trees are able to produce much more heat per cord of wood. A cord is the amount of wood in a well-stacked woodpile measuring 4 feet wide by 8 feet long by 4 feet high.

Following are heat values (in million BTU's) per cord for various species of tree. The higher the value, the better the wood.

Ash, Green	22.8	
Cottonwood	15.9	
Elm, American	19.8	Difficult to split
Elm, Siberian	20.9	Difficult to split
Hackberry	21.0	
Honeylocust	25.6	
Locust, Black	28.3	Difficult to split
Maple, Sugar	24.0	
Maple, Silver	18.9	
Mulberry	25.3	
Oak, Red	24.0	

Oak, Bur	24.9	
Oak, Post	25.6	
Osage Orange (Hedge)	32.6	Sparks, do not use in open fireplace
Sycamore	19.5	Difficult to split
Walnut, Black	21.8	

The Kansas Forest Service has a publication titled “Managing Your Woodland for Firewood” that is quite helpful.

Remember to obtain firewood locally. Emerald Ash Borer is now in Kansas because of transported wood. (Ward Upham)

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