

Some lawns may come out of winter with dead areas in need of reseeding. While early September is the ideal time to seed Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue, spring seeding success can be improved by seeding as soon as possible so seedlings establish roots before summers' heat. Improve seed to soil contact by aerifying, power raking, and/or hand raking right before seeding. After seeding, a light raking will further mix the seed and soil. Water lightly and often to keep the seedbed moist. Mulch will help conserve water, but use lightly so at least 30 to 40% of soil is still visible through the mulch. Since seedlings will not develop a decent root system until next fall, use low rates of fertilizer, about one-half to three-fourths pounds per 1000 square feet, applied every four to six weeks until mid-June; and keep the area well-watered all summer while avoiding overwatering which can lead to poor rooting and disease.

Starter fertilizers are recommended for applying to the soil of newly planted vegetables, flowers, trees and shrubs. They're also called starter solutions or root stimulators. Are these needed when planting? Most of the time, if you have good soil, the answer is no. But there are times when starter fertilizers might be beneficial. Most starter solutions contain higher amounts of phosphorous. While phosphorous is important for root growth, most of our soils have plenty of phosphorous and adding more could be harmful. However, during spring, plants can have difficulty taking up nutrients in cool soils. Starter solutions place soluble nutrients near roots so plants get off to a good start. As a general rule, a starter fertilizer could be used in spring when the soil is cool. Once soils warm, and during fall planting when soils are warm, starter solutions are rarely needed when planting or transplanting new plants.

If white grubs are found in a yard or garden now, no control is needed. White grubs overwinter in soil as full grown larvae which are difficult to kill. In spring, they move closer to the surface, pupate and adult beetles emerge late May through June to lay eggs, which hatch in August. It is this new generation that can damage lawns if populations are high. Finding grubs now does not mean there will be damage this summer; and trying to kill white grubs found now will not prevent damage later. Base grub control decisions on past history and monitoring this year. If a lawn had serious grub damage last year, an application of a preventive insecticide, such as imidacloprid, could be applied to lawns from May into early July. If a lawn had no damage last year, monitor the lawn in August. If eight to 10 grubs can be found per square foot at that time, an insecticide application of Sevin or Dylox may be justified.

Spruce tree problems are on the rise, especially as spruce continue to be much overplanted. Spruce are affected by a number of diseases, including needle cast, shoot blight, tip blight, Cytospora canker and others. These, along with a combination of stress from drought, weather extremes, poor planting, and incorrect care, are causing spruce needle browning and branch dieback. And while a few of these diseases can be reduced with fungicides, canker diseases have no control. And we are now seeing another spruce canker, Phomopsis, causing dieback. If you're planning to plant an evergreen tree in the near future, consider something besides the overplanted Colorado Blue Spruce; or mix it up and plant more than one type. Some evergreens to consider, depending on your site, include Concolor fir, Ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, Vanderwolf Southwestern White pine and even Norway Spruce.

Henbit is the weed with small purple flowers now blooming in yards and gardens. This weed seems to appear out of nowhere in spring; however, it's been there all winter. Henbit is a winter annual. It grows from seed each year with seed germinating in fall and young plants overwintering. They're often so small, they go unnoticed or appear at a time when we're not paying much attention to our yards. To confirm its henbit, check the stems. If they are square, it's henbit. Trying to kill henbit with herbicide at this time of year is often a waste of time and money. Plants may be burned back, but are rarely killed and most die shortly after flowering or with hot weather. A tall mowing height and hand-pulling are good options for now. Pull or hoe henbit out of gardens. If herbicide control is needed, spot treat plants in late fall or apply a pre-emergence herbicide in September. Be sure to read and follow all pesticide label directions.