

IN THE DIRT

Mowing Your Lawn

Continue mowing as long as your lawn keeps growing, and return clippings to the lawn. Grass unmowed late in the season can become matted under snow, making the turf more prone to snow mold diseases.

Recommended mowing height for Kentucky bluegrass throughout the growing season, is 2.5-3.5 inches and 3-3.5 inches for tall fescue.

In the past, recommendations were common to raise and lower mower height settings during the growing season, however research has shown very little benefit from this practice, compared to mowing at a slight taller setting throughout the entire season. Plus, it certainly is easier for most homeowners to set their mower at one height in spring and leave it for the entire summer.

Weed Control & Tree Safety

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

With September and early October being key times to control perennial, broadleaf weeds like dandelion and ground ivy, it's also time to remind people to be careful using herbicides near trees and shrubs, especially dicamba.

Weeds targeted at this time of year are perennial, meaning the plants survive from year to year; and broadleaf, meaning the weeds are not grasses or sedges. Trees and shrubs are also perennial broadleaf plants; hence herbicides applied to kill broadleaf weeds can damage woody plants.

Trees with symptoms of dicamba injury are being seen more often. Symptoms include dwarfed, distorted, and/or discolored foliage. On evergreens, like spruce, the symptoms might be droopy tips.

Dicamba is a broadleaf herbicide found in a number of different lawn herbicides. The issue with dicamba is not only drifting onto leaves but also absorption by tree and shrub roots. Dicamba is mobile in soil and will remain active in soil for an extended period so it can easily be taken up by tree roots.

Dicamba labels sometimes state the product should not be applied within the dripline of a tree, meaning beneath the canopy. However, tree and shrub roots extend much farther out than the dripline and a safer approach is to not apply dicamba within a distance equal to two times the tree or shrub height.

This would mean no dicamba applications within 40 feet of a 20-foot tall tree, within 60 feet of a 30-foot tall tree, and so on. And this recommendation reduces contact with tree roots in the soil, it does not reduce exposure to drifting if products are applied on a windy day.

This could be challenging in a lawn situation, especially on smaller properties. If the "2 times" recommendation cannot be followed; avoid using herbicides containing dicamba. Positively identify weeds and determine what the best herbicide or combination product is for control.

The most common broadleaf herbicides used on lawns include 2, 4-D, MCPP (mecoprop), dicamba, triclopyr, and fluroxypyr. There are many different commercial formulations and mixtures of these compounds with varying brand names. Read the label and know what you are buying.

And if herbicides are applied at the correct time and in the correct way, weed kill will be increased and the need to apply herbicides, which can damage trees and shrubs, reduced.

The most effective control of broadleaf weeds is obtained when postemergence herbicides are applied as sprays to foliage, and not washed off by irrigation or rainfall. Most products are rainfast within 4 to 7 hours, but this varies with herbicides and weather conditions.

Postemergence broadleaf herbicides are most effective when weeds are actively growing and air temperature is greater than 70 degrees Fahrenheit. And fall is an important time to control perennials weeds as the plant is moving stored food into roots and herbicides are also translocated into roots.

Herbicides are most effective when applied to actively growing weeds not stressed by extreme temperatures or drought. It is generally recommended that lawns not be mowed within 3 days before or after herbicide treatment.

Source: UNL Turf Info, South Dakota Pest Update, and Penn State Center for Turfgrass Science



September Garden Guide



- * Plant peonies now, but make sure the crowns are buried only one and a half to two inches below ground level. Planting them deeper than two inches may keep them from blooming.
- * Root cuttings from annual bedding plants such as begonias, coleus, geraniums and impatiens. These plants can be overwintered in a sunny window and provide plants for next year's garden.
- * Before the first frost dig up caladiums. Allow them to dry and store them in a dry place for the winter.
- * Perennial phlox can be divided about every third or fourth year. Divide big clumps of perennial phlox into thirds. Early fall or early spring are the best times to plant or transplant them.
- * Divide lily-of-the-valley.
- * Allow plants to finish the summer growth cycle in a normal manner. Never encourage growth with heavy applications of fertilizer or excessive pruning at this time. Plants will delay their dormancy process that has already begun in anticipation of winter in the months ahead. New growth can be injured by an early freeze.
- * Tree wound paints used after pruning are no longer recommended as they can slow healing and may promote decay.
- * Rake up leaves, twigs and fruit from crabapple trees and dispose of them in the trash to help control apple scab disease.
- * Water newly planted trees and shrubs to provide sufficient moisture and prevent winter damage. Add a three inch layer of organic mulch such as shredded bark around the base of plants to retain soil moisture and regulate soil temperature.
- * Wood ashes contain phosphorous, potassium and calcium. It can be placed on vegetable gardens and flower beds.
- * Hot peppers will keep best if stored after they are dry. Thread the peppers on a string to dry. Hang in a cool, dry place.
- * Pot up chives, parsley and other herbs to extend the growing season in the house.
- * Pears should be picked at the hard ripe stage and allowed to finish ripening off the tree. The base color of yellow pears should change from green to yellow as the fruit approaches maturity.
- * Do not wait for frost warnings to move your plants indoors. Temperatures of 45 degrees Fahrenheit or lower can damage many tropical house plants.