

IN THE DIRT

Peonies & Powdery Mildew Management

"grayish white powder on leaf surfaces"

Powdery mildew causes grayish white powder-like patches on upper leaf surfaces and can cause heavily infected leaves to die. It is promoted by warm temperatures and high humidity. Many types of plants are susceptible, including peony, Phlox, Monarda and Zinnia. If plants have been heavily infected this summer consider replacing them with resistant varieties. Remove heavily infected, brown or dying stems now. Moving plants to an area of higher sunlight and better air circulation will help reduce infections in the future.



September Garden Activities



Protect honeybees. Use caution when applying insecticides to flowering plants.



Plant or divide peonies now. Bury the crowns only 1 to 1 1/2 inches below the soil. Planting them deeper than 2 inches can result in poor blooming.

- Bring in cuttings of geraniums, herbs, or other perennials.
- Dig summer flowering bulbs, cure and store in an appropriate place. Plant spring blooming bulbs. An inexpensive colorful golf tee is a great way to mark dormant bulb plants.



September is the time to ensure a good harvest from your strawberry planting next year. Strawberry flower buds begin to form in late summer, making this an important time of year to maintain good moisture levels in your strawberry bed. Plants generally require 1 1/2- 2 inches or more of water each week depending on soil type and weather conditions. Apply enough water to wet the soil to a depth of 6-8 inches.



Plant balled and burlap or container stock of adapted trees.



Bring in house plants before night temperatures drop below 50°F. Inspect plants for insects. Bring in amaryllis and allow to go dormant.



Pickup and destroy windfall apples to reduce numbers of overwintering insects.



Properly cure onions and gladiolus for winter storage. Discard diseased onions or bulbs.



Termites and carpenter ants cause extensive structural damage to homes. Check for the presence of these pests at least once a year.

Source: Backyard Farmer

LAWN ISSUES

By: Kelly Feehan, Extension Educator

Reddish brown patches, pock marked areas of tan grass and yellowing. These are lawn issues we are seeing now and have been expecting given environmental conditions this year.

Roughly circular patches of reddish-brown grass, especially in tall fescue lawns, are symptoms of brown patch disease. Kentucky bluegrass is also affected but symptoms are less prominent.



To confirm brown patch, closely inspect individual grass blades in the affected area. Look for irregularly shaped, tan-colored lesions surrounded by a dark brown margin. It is best to do this just before mowing rather than right after mowing or lesions may be removed.

While brown patch will not kill a lawn, and affected areas often recover by spring, good cultural practices should be used to reduce disease. For example, avoid fast release nitrogen applications during summer and avoid evening or night irrigation. There's not much we can do about rainfall and cloudy weather.

If brown patch causes thinning of an area, overseed with cultivars resistant to brown patch. Seeding is best done by mid-September and lawns should be core aerated prior to seeding to provide seed to soil contact. Without aeration, overseeding will not be as successful.

Fungicides, although not recommended this late in the season, also provide control. If fungicides are used, apply them at the first sign of disease, usually late June into July. Remember, fungicides do not kill the fungus or cure infections. They work best by preventing infections early in the growing season.

I'm often asked if grass clippings should be collected when there is an active disease. Research is not showing much benefit to doing this and the fungus can be spread by the mower itself. It would be wise to follow the recommendation of mowing often enough so that no more than one-third of the grass blade is removed during any one mowing.

Pock-marked areas of tan grass, especially in full sun locations, could be summer patch disease. This is a root rot disease, so dead grass in the affected area can easily be pulled from the roots. On close inspection, no lesions or leaf spots will be seen on individual grass blades.

Summer patch is mostly found on Kentucky bluegrass and is a difficult disease to control. While fungicides can be applied as a soil drench in May when the roots are being infected, they have not proven to be very effective. Once this disease is established, reseeding or overseeding the area with improved cultivars or changing the turfgrass species to tall fescue may be needed.

Yellowing of turfgrass at this time of year has almost become so the norm so I don't receive near as many questions related to it. As you may know, lawn yellowing is caused by a combination of hot soil temperatures, too wet of soil, and high pH soils.

Hot soil temperatures and wet soils, often due to irrigation systems that are rarely turned off, lead to root dysfunction that reduces the root systems ability to take up iron. A nutrient that is not as readily available to plants in high pH soils.

Once soil temperatures cool off and irrigation systems are turned off, lawns typically come out of grass yellowing and green up.

If needed, an application of iron (no nitrogen) can be made to mask the yellowing. It is best to apply a liquid application of ferrous or iron sulfate, or other iron source, and do not water it in.

Dothistroma Needle Blight



Dothistroma needle blight on Austrian Pine. Robert L. Anderson, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

One of the most common fungal diseases of pines in Nebraska is Dothistroma needle blight. This disease is responsible for much of the premature needle drop that occurs in windbreaks and ornamental pine plantings. Twenty pine species are affected by this disease, but in the central and eastern United States the fungus is found most commonly found on, and causes the greatest amount of damage, to Austrian and Ponderosa pine. Scotch pine is usually not severely damaged.

Symptoms of infection begin in the fall. Yellow or tan spots appear on needles of the current year's or older growth. These spots darken and become brown or reddish-brown then spread to form a band around the needle. These bands are often bordered by a yellow, chlorotic ring on each side. The fungus grows within these tissues, killing that portion of the needle beyond the lesion.

Initially, the tip of the needle dies while the base remains green, but eventually as the disease progresses, the base of the needle also dies, and the entire needle drops off the tree. Typically, clusters of needles within a shoot are infected. Lower branches of trees are most severely infected although the entire tree can be affected. Usually the greatest amount of needle drop is seen in the late spring or early summer following infection.

Initial infection of the tree by fungal spores occurs during rainy periods from May to October. Germinating spores enter the needles through natural openings and the infection process begins. Symptoms appear about three to four months after the first infection, usually becoming visible in late fall. Infection of susceptible needles can be significantly reduced with liquid (Tenn-Cop 5E or Black Leaf Liquid Copper Fungicide) or fixed copper formulations (Basic copper sulfate or Tribasic Copper Sulfate) or with Bordeaux mixture applied twice during the growing season. Read and follow all label directions carefully before application.

The first application should be done in mid-May, and protects the existing needles from infection. The second application, which protects the current season's new growth, is made after considerable new growth has taken place, usually around mid-June. This spring's new growth is initially resistant to infection and will not become susceptible until midsummer, around July.

Source: <https://byf.unl.edu/dothistroma-needle-blight>

Plant Asters for Fall Color

By Mary Jane Frogge, Extension Associate, Lancaster County



New England aster (Photo by Mary Jane Frogge, Nebraska Extension in Lancaster County)

Asters are hardy perennials that bloom late summer until the first hard frost. Many asters are native to Nebraska and are a late-season source of pollen for bees, migrating monarchs and other pollinators.

Asters native to Nebraska include:

- Smooth aster, 2–4 feet tall with purple flowers
- Prairie aster, 3–4 feet tall with lavender flowers
- Heath aster, 1–3 feet tall with white flowers
- New England aster, 3–5 feet tall with pink, red-violet, purple or blue flowers

Asters are easy to grow and look great in a mass planting. They can be planted with other native plants like purple coneflower, coreopsis, black-eyed Susan and native grasses.

The main plant disease is powdery mildew, it causes a whitish growth that appears on leaves. To reduce the chance of this disease, make sure asters are in full sun and plants are not crowded.