

Let's Talk Gardening

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The Country Gardener

Fall is in the Air

With those 3+ inches of rain last week, the fire ant mounds are all over the place. This is a good time to treat the whole yard with Amdro. The directions on the bottle say to use about 1-2 pounds per acre and spread it with a hand-held spreader (the directions also tell you how much to use for 5,000 square feet). That's a pretty light application, but considering that the ants forage as far as 50 feet or so from the nest, it's enough to get rid of 90+ percent of them. Better than me, I always say (well, almost always). But don't spread it right now. Wait until it dries out a little. As I write this on Tuesday evening, it's supposed to rain the rest of the week, so I'm gonna wait until next weekend or even next week to apply mine. Of course, for those of you who are "organic" there's Anti Fuego from Garden-Ville. According to Malcolm Beck, it'll really do a number on those pests.

Did you know that doing gardening uses most of the major muscle groups of the body? The use of the hips, legs, shoulders, and arms in gardening burns the most calories and helps build bone density. Researchers at the University of Arkansas find that women aged 50 and over who garden at least once a week show higher bone density than those who perform other types of exercise. One of the researchers, Lori Turner, says that, "there's a lot of weight-bearing motion going on in the garden—digging holes, pulling weeds, pushing a mower. In addition, it's done outside which boosts vitamin D production and aids the body in calcium absorption. Also, since gardening is a pleasure rather than a "workout," more people are likely to stick with it." Of course, like any exercise program, there should be a warm-up period first.

Yeah. Right! I know my wife has read this, so why doesn't she help me outside? Why doesn't she mow the grass? Why won't she pull weeds all day? Digging holes?...in my dreams! Why? Probably the same reason that she doesn't make me try to cook. It all works out, I guess.

Because of all the rain and the recent cooler weather, you might be seeing some brown patch in your St. Augustine grass. It's a fungal disease that affects the grass blades where they attach to the runners. If you pull on these yellowed blades, you'll find that they come loose from the runner very easily. The first thing you see is some yellowing of the blades in diffused, rounded patches...about 20 inches or so in diameter. The patches will definitely be round and will continue to be generally round as they grow. This might tell you that the grass isn't dead, just hurt a little. At this time of year, the spots may even begin to merge as they gain in girth.

Luckily, this fungal disease isn't fatal to the St. Augustine turf. It only attacks the blades and not the roots or runners; therefore, the potential for the grass to grow again is great. As soon as the colder weather comes, the fungus usually backs off and the grass may actually start growing in the center of the circles before the first freeze. There are chemical ways to control it, too; two chemicals that come to mind are Terrachlor and Bayleton. The granules seem to be the most effective. I'm sure that there is an organic product, too, but I don't have any idea what it might be (with the exception of corn meal or corn gluten). I'm told that these corn products produce a sort-of anti-fungus fungus that overpowers the brown patch fungus and keeps it in check, but I can't vouch for that as I've not had the problem and not tried the solution. If you do nothing about it, the fungus will be killed over the winter and the brown rings will fill in next spring. If, for some unknown reason, the rings don't fill in, you can always treat it then.

The problem originates when the grass stays wet for extended periods of time. This means, in so many words, don't water the grass in the evening causing it to be wet all night. In fact, you can turn off the sprinkler system now if you want. You don't need it.

It's not time to fertilize the yard yet, but it's getting close. Next week until the first of November is the time to do it. Be sure to use fertilizer that has the word "winterizer" on it.

Send your comments and/or questions to gardener@gvtc.com.