

D's Notes 08/16/21

Plants for Late Season Bloom

Landscapes are often drab this time of year. You can add interest to your home by planting shrubs this fall or next spring that flower later in the growing season. Consider one or more of the following.

Rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus*) is a tall shrub that produces single or double flowers. Colors range from white to red, purple or violet, or combinations, depending on the variety.

Crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) are dwarf-to-tall shrubs or trees. They are not reliably winter hardy in Kansas and often die back to the ground. Crapemyrtle flowers on new wood, so plants pruned (or killed) to the ground while dormant in late winter or early spring will bloom later the same year. Flower color varies from white, pink, to purple or deep red on different plants.

Bluebeard (*Caryopteris x clandonensis*) is also known as blue-spirea, blue-mist shrub, or caryopteris. It usually is found with blue flowers, but some cultivars have a bluish-violet to violet flower color. Plants are usually cut back in late winter or early spring. Flowers are borne on the current season's growth.

Sweet Autumn clematis (*Clematis terniflora*) is a vigorous vine with large masses of small, white flowers that have a wonderful fragrance. Be careful with this one; it can easily outgrow its bounds. It is often a good idea to cut it back to the ground in early spring.

Davidiana clematis (*Clematis heracleifolia* var. *Davidiana*) is a bush-type clematis with small but interesting violet-blue flowers. Female plants bear interesting fluffy seed heads into the winter. This clematis needs to be cut back to the ground each year to help maintain the shape of the plant.

The PeeGee hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata* *Grandiflora*) is a somewhat coarse plant that develops large clusters of white flowers. It can be trained into a tree-like form.

Fall Armyworms on Turf

We are seeing numerous reports of fall armyworm especially in southeast and south-central Kansas. Though we have had fall armyworm outbreaks in the past, this is earlier than usual.

Armyworms are so-called because they invade fields or landscapes as large groups and can cause a lawn to turn brown seemingly overnight.

Young worms are ½ to ¾ inch long. Mature ones are 1 ½ inches long. Body color may vary from green to almost black but light stripes will be visible along the length of the body. Look for a whitish inverted "Y" on the top of the black head. It normally takes 2 to 3 weeks to progress from egg to pupa. The adult is a moth.

Armyworm damage can resemble drought damage but close inspection of the turf will reveal the larvae. Look for active feeding during early morning or evening hours or on cloudy days. Larvae feed on foliage and the resulting dehydration causes turf to

quickly brown. Normally, armyworm damage does not kill established turf but may if populations are high enough. Thick infestations of fall armyworm can damage turfgrass crowns which will kill turf.

Acephate (Orthene, Acephate), spinosad (Conserve; Natural Guard Spinosad, Captain Jack's Deadbug Brew; Monterey Garden Insect Spray) and other insecticides are effective caterpillar killers. Treat in late afternoon, when the caterpillars are likely to begin feeding. Do not mow for 3 days after treatment. (Ward Upham)

For Seeding Success, Pay Attention to "Other Crop" on the Seed Label

Fall planting time is close at hand, so it's time to talk about grass seed. Many people have the idea that all grass seed is basically the same. Big mistake! Choosing quality seed is one of the most important steps in successfully planting or overseeding your lawn. If you don't know what to look for, you may be introducing unwanted intruders into that new stand. In particular, we are concerned with seed contaminated with orchardgrass and/or rough bluegrass (also known by its Latin name, *Poa trivialis*, or *Poa triv* for short). These are both perennial grassy weeds that cannot be selectively controlled once they are in a lawn.

Orchardgrass is a problem because it is faster growing and lighter green than our turfgrasses. It is a bunch grass and so doesn't spread, but infested areas are still unsightly due to small tufts of this species pockmarking the lawn.

Rough bluegrass is fine-textured and forms circular patches in the lawn. It blends in fairly well until summertime heat causes it to turn brown rapidly. If the rough bluegrass would just die in the heat, it would only be a temporary problem. Unfortunately, it usually just goes dormant, turning green again with cooler temperatures and rain.

Buying quality seed starts with knowing how to decipher the seed label. One of the most important things to look for is listed as percent "Other Crop Seed" or "Other Crop." "Other Crop" refers to any species that is intentionally grown for some purpose. That would include turfgrasses (those species other than the one you are buying) and pasture grasses.

Orchardgrass and rough bluegrass both are listed as "Other Crop" seed. Seed labels are required by law to show the percentage (by weight) of "Other Crop Seed" in the bag, but unless a species constitutes 5% or more, the label doesn't have to list each species by name.

How much "Other Crop" is too much? That's a difficult question to answer, but the tolerance is very low. It depends on what the "Other Crop" actually is, and the quality expectations of the buyer. In practice, "Other Crop" may refer to something relatively harmless, like a small amount of perennial ryegrass in a bag of tall fescue, or it may refer to something bad, like rough bluegrass or orchardgrass. The homeowner really has no easy way of knowing what the "Other Crop" is, although there are some hints. If it is something bad, less than 1/2 of 1% can result in a lawn filled with hard to control weeds. Obviously, if your expectations are high for the area you are planting, you would

want the "Other Crop" to be as close to zero as possible. Good quality seed will often have 0.01% "Other Crop Seed" or less.

Another line on the seed label is "Weed Seed." It should also be 0.01% or less.

Are Crabapples Safe to Eat?

Crabapples are safe to consume as long as you don't eat too many of them. Actually, the only difference between crabapples and apples is the size of the fruit. By definition, crabapples have fruit that are 2 inches or less in diameter, and apples are more than 2 inches in diameter. By this definition, most of the apples grown from seed will be crabapples. The fruiting apples are grafted.

So did people ever plant crabapples from seed? Of course they did. Just think of Johnny Appleseed. But those apples were normally used for jelly, applesauce, and cider and not for fresh eating. Even in Johnny Appleseed's day, dessert apples were grafted.

There is one other caveat with using crabapples from a tree in the landscape. Make sure the tree hasn't been sprayed as an ornamental with a pesticide that isn't labeled for fruit tree apples. If it has, then the fruit should not be used.

Dividing Daylilies

Daylilies need to be divided every three to four years to maintain good flower production. Though they may be divided in early spring before growth starts, it is more common to divide them in September. Many gardeners cut back the tops to about half their original height to make plants easier to handle.

Daylilies have a very tough root system that can make them difficult to divide while in place. Dividing in place is practical if it hasn't been long since the last division. In such cases, a spading fork can be used to peel fans from the existing clump. If the plants have been in place longer and are well grown together, it is more practical to divide them after the entire clump has been dug.

Use a spade to lift the entire clump out of the ground. Although it is possible to cut the clump apart with a sharp spade, you'll save more roots by using two spading forks back-to-back to divide the clump into sections. Each section should be about the size of a head of cauliflower. An easier method involves using a stream of water from a garden hose to wash the soil from the clump, and then rolling the clump back and forth until the individual divisions separate.

Space divisions 24 to 30 inches apart, and set each at its original depth. The number of flowers will be reduced the first year after division but will return to normal until the plants need to be divided again.

Spring Flowering Shrubs

August through September is the time period our spring-flowering shrubs set flower buds. Therefore, watering, as needed, at this time can help with next spring's bloom. Also avoid pruning at this time of year as it can reduce bloom for next spring.

Examples of spring-flowering shrubs include Forsythia, Flowering Quince, Almond, Beautybush, Deutzia, Pyracantha, Lilac, Mock Orange, Cotoneaster, Weigela, Viburnum and Witchhazel.

Composting: What to Add

For fastest composting, alternate layers of "greens" and "browns." Greens are materials with a high amount of nitrogen as compared to carbon. Browns have less nitrogen as compared to carbon. The mixture of the two produces the "just right" amount of carbon and nitrogen to give the microorganisms just what they need to compost quickly.

The most common greens are fresh grass clippings, coffee grounds, small weeds, fruit and veggie scraps, plant trimmings and animal manure. The browns would include shredded leaves, sawdust, wood chips, hay, straw, dried grass clippings and prunings from small branches. These materials can be mixed together at the start or layered. If layering, alternate layers of brown materials (6 to 8 inches deep) with green materials (2 to 3 inches thick) until you reach a height of 3 to 5 feet. If green materials are in short supply, add 1 to 2 cups per square yard of a commercial garden fertilizer in place of the green material layer. (Ward Upham)

Composting: The Science

Composting is a process whereby you can turn trash into treasure by recycling garden waste and kitchen scraps into humus that can improve soil structure and act as a fertilizer.

Microorganisms drive this process and are composed of bacteria, actinomycetes and fungi. Bacteria are composed of three different types that work best at different temperature ranges. Psychrophilic bacteria start the composting process and prefer the lowest temperature range and are most active at 55 degrees F. Their activity produces a small amount of heat so that the mesophilic bacteria can take over. Mesophilic bacteria prefer a temperature within the pile of 70 to 100 degrees. They are followed by the most heat-loving bacteria which are the thermophilic bacteria. They thrive at temperatures between 113 to 160 degrees F. These microorganisms die when they finish digesting the material in the pile and the temperature drops.

Actinomycetes are a special bacteria that are similar to fungi and molds. They are important as they help decompose some of the more resistant materials such as lignin and cellulose. They work best at moderate temperatures.

Fungi are less heat resistant and prefer temperatures between 70 and 75 degrees F. They are compost "finishers" and are most active after the other microorganisms are done.

So the compost pile goes through a process whereby the compost pile starts cool, builds up to a high temperature and then cools. Next week we will look at what we need to make a compost pile. For more information on compost pile microbes, see

<https://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/organics/homecompost/microbes>

Composting: Choosing a Bin

Though raw organic materials will eventually compost if given moisture and access to the microorganisms that break organic materials down, building a compost pile can greatly speed up the process. Also, a properly constructed compost pile will produce enough heat to destroy insect pests and disease organisms.

A number of things are needed for building a compost pile including a bin, a source of water, "green" materials and "brown" materials. This week we will cover bins.

Our goal is to have a bin that will hold at least a 3 foot x 3 foot x 3 foot high mound of material. Anything less than this and the process will be slow and will not produce sufficient heat to kill insect and disease pests. For home gardeners, a 5 x 5 x 5 bin would be about the largest that can be easily handled. Though there are a number of compost bins that can be purchased, gardeners can build their own. A simple bin can be made from discarded pallets or a ring of woven wire. Plans are available for a variety of bins at <https://extension2.missouri.edu/g6957> . You may want to consider having a 3 bin system which consists of a holding bin to hold materials until enough materials have been collected to compost, a composting bin for a actual compost process and a third bin to hold the finished compost. For a video on choosing a bin, see <https://bit.ly/2AwhCPy>.. (Ward Upham)