

The week ahead

TUESDAY HEALTHY LIVING

CANCER IN THE CLOSET: One employee's battle to be seen as more than her disease

WEDNESDAY TASTE

PLANET OF CHOICES: Buying local food is one way to go green, and it's good for you

NEXT WEEK HOME

GROWING HAPPINESS: Despite the loss of lavender crops, happiness is part of the Lavender Ridge business model, and they're trying to spread it

Today on dallasnews.com

Holiday help from Heloise

Survey: What bugs you during the holidays? This year, Heloise is here to help. The advice goddess will share her best holiday tips with readers just in time for Thanksgiving. No matter if your turkey trauma is long past; she can offer condolences or



congratulations as needed. And maybe other readers can learn from your folly. Send your questions, problems and holiday disaster stories by Oct. 22.

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HOME

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What's best way to kill Bermuda?

ORGANIC ANSWERS



HOWARD GARRETT
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I am working on a Scouting project to plant a wildflower and native-grass area from seeds. I have had a tough time killing Bermuda grass on this 400-square-foot site, which is at an elementary school. First, I covered the area with dark tarps for four weeks. Then, I sprayed the area with a vinegar-oil-soap mixture and covered it for two more weeks. I hand-pulled clumps of grass with as much root as I could get. I watered the area deeply and covered it again, this time with clear plastic. I plan to leave this in place for four weeks. I plan to spread dry molasses on top of the soil after that to kill the remaining Bermuda roots. Does this sound like the right approach?

J.T., Southlake

It sounds like a good plan, but it may be more work than necessary. Spreading dry molasses and then covering the area with clear plastic should be enough.

I have a 15-year-old live oak that has many yellow leaves in one section of branches. There is a low area beside this tree where water stood for several days after heavy rains this year. I have two other live oaks that seem to be fine, but they did not have standing water nearby. I have used a vinegar and orange oil treatment around the yellowing tree. Do you think I should start the Sick Tree Treatment?

B.D., Dallas

Yes, the Sick Tree Treatment is in order. If you correct the drainage, you will prevent further problems of this sort. (See Resources to obtain instructions.)

My cypress trees have "balls" growing all over them. Are these seed balls? If they are, how do I grow more trees?

E.S., Dallas

What you see are the cones, or fruits, of the cypress. After the cones mature, dry and are broken into pieces (the seeds), you can plant them. Fertilize with compost tea or Garrett Juice at planting time. (See Resources to obtain recipes.)



FILE 1996/Staff photo

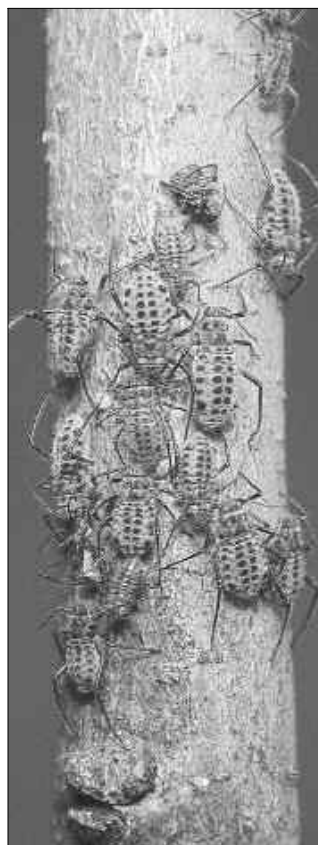
Try spraying garlic-pepper tea around pet feeders raided by raccoons.

A friend who travels a lot has a problem with raccoons eating cat food from an automatic pet feeder. Do you know of a pet feeder that will discourage raccoons? Or do you have suggestions for deterring raccoons? Also, how can I get rid of groundhogs? We have tried commercial products and old-timers' suggestions, but the groundhogs keep digging.

J.E., Sherman

I don't have any information about pet feeders. Garlic-pepper tea usually repels raccoons. Spray the tea around the feeder.

Mixtures of hot pepper and castor oil are effective against most animals that live in the ground. Drench the soil with the mixture. (See Resources to obtain recipes.)



Michael Merchant

Blackstrap molasses works best for repelling aphids, but agricultural molasses works, too.

My crape myrtles are infested with aphids and are covered with black mold. I sprayed them with a mixture of baking soda, orange oil and regular molasses. I think it helped, but the trees are still covered with black mold. When I went to a supermarket to buy blackstrap molasses, I discovered that the grocery variety contains no sulfur. I then tried two feed stores, still with no luck. Where can I buy blackstrap molasses that contains sulfur? Sulfur probably is the fungus-fighting ingredient one needs in molasses.

J.S., Georgetown

Agricultural molasses sold at garden centers and feed stores is just about all you will find these days for horticultural use. It works well, but blackstrap molasses would be better.

The black substance on the crape myrtles is sooty mold caused by the waste, or "honeydew," produced by aphids. A new product called Plant Wash is effective for that, and it usually takes just one treatment. If you don't find this product in stores, the manufacturer's Web site is www.soilmender.com.

What is the proper way to trim blueberry bushes? And what type of soil is best for them? My father lives in Ohio and has very nice blueberry bushes. I want to help him transplant about 20 bushes.

V.R., Dallas

Blueberry bushes should be planted in sandy, acid soil. If it is necessary, prune them lightly immediately after harvesting the last fruit of the season.

RESOURCES

ONLINE: www.dirtdoctor.com for free organic-program handouts

RADIO: KSKY-AM (660), Saturday 11 a.m.-noon and Sunday 8-11 a.m. www.ksky.com.

MAIL: P.O. Box 140650, Dallas, TX 75214

CHORES

Going green in winter comes with a cost

By RICK ROSEN
Staff Writer
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Now is the best time to overseed lawns for an emerald landscape throughout the gray winter.

Be aware, however, that having green turf in winter requires mowing, water and fertilizer — and you might be setting up your lawn for failure.

In our area, overseeding is usually accomplished with an annual, cool-season turfgrass such as perennial or annual rye, over an existing lawn of St. Augustine or Bermuda. You use a fertilizer spreader to broadcast the seed, purchased from big-box retailers and independent garden centers.

Here are the basic steps for overseeding:

■ Scalp the existing lawn and compost the grass clippings. This helps ensure that the seed has good contact with dirt.

■ Spread the seed over the lawn, back and forth, up and down. If you don't have a spreader, scatter it by hand, although uneven coverage may result if you don't spread it uniformly.

■ Rake the ground to improve contact with the seed.

■ Tamp down the seed by walking on it.

■ Water thoroughly. Be sure to irrigate regularly for the next three weeks or so.

Overseeding is fairly easy. But should homeowners overseed?

Dr. James McAfee, turfgrass specialist with Texas Cooperative Extension, believes that, as a general rule, no. The reason? Overseeding can stress your lawn.

It goes back to steps you take to ensure the seed has good contact with the ground. Scalping the turf limits the lawn's ability to store the carbohydrates it needs for winter.

And in spring, when ryegrass is growing great, your permanent grass spends energy growing through the ryegrass. More stress.

Also, the green look may require you to water and mow weekly, and fertilize. Dr. McAfee suggests homeowners use precious water instead to maintain the permanent lawn.

While sports fields and golf courses are overseeded to offset the foot traffic they get, home lawns aren't required to stay green.

If you do want to overseed, mid-October is the best time to apply the seed. You can do so up until early November, says Dr. McAfee, but you risk a

freeze before the new grass is developed enough to withstand it. Ryegrass needs six to eight weeks of growth before a freeze.

Other tips from Texas Cooperative Extension:

■ Overseed with perennial and annual ryegrass at a rate of 10 to 12 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet. Fertilize at a rate of one to two pounds of nitrogen in winter.

■ Overseed rough bluegrass, which is not as popular in our area, in zoysia grasses and hybrid Bermuda grasses. Overseed about six to eight pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet. Rough bluegrass requires a little less nitrogen.

■ If you have Bermuda grass, perennial ryegrass is probably a better choice than annual. Though less expensive, annual rye doesn't hold its color as well in the coldest parts of winter, and it grows so fast that you have to mow weekly.

■ For St. Augustine, use annual rye, because it has a more erect habit and will grow through St. Augustine more easily.

■ Mow both kinds of ryegrass at a height of 2 to 2.5 inches.

■ Rye has fairly tough blade ends, so keep your mower blade sharp.



Peter Malinowski

Do you have your heart set on a winter lawn that looks like a golf course? It's time to overseed but, before you do, recognize that doing so requires more water, fertilizer and mowing.

PASS IT ON

Pass It On is a free service for readers who want to donate unwanted items. To submit, e-mail home@dallasnews.com. Offerings are accepted up to one week before publication. Requests for items are not accepted.

FOR A NONPROFIT

Air-conditioner condenser unit. 3 1/2 tons. In working condition. Tax receipt requested. Sandy, Dallas, 972-484-9014.

About 50 canna bulbs. Coral blooms. Ready to dig. Call between 8 a.m. and noon. JM, Plano, 214-274-8818.

Sigrid Mureen

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10:30 am - "Herbs 101"
1:30 am - "Fall Herb Gardens"
3:00 pm - "Herbs and the Environment"
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Sunday Programs Oct. 14
Lavender Sunday - All day!
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