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SERVING GLYNN, CAMDEN, MCINTOSH, WAYNE, LIBERTY, BRYAN & CHATHAM COUNTIES | SEPTEMBER 2019



Fall Fertilization is the Key to a Good Spring Start

The growth of your landscape is way ahead of the actual season. Like athletes building up for an important contest, your lawn and landscape plants will be preparing all through the winter for their burst of growth next spring.

In the fall, the turf, plants, and trees are as hungry as bears before hibernation. They are capable of consuming a tremendous amount of food in the fall. In many cases, food use is higher during this time of year than through any other period of the season. As the days get shorter and the nights get cooler, plants begin a complex process of growth and preparation which continues (mainly out of sight in the root system) throughout most of the winter months. This natural process occurs every fall on its own and without any outside help, but its effects and benefits are greatly improved with correct and timely fall fertilization.

THE MANY BENEFITS OF FALL FEEDING

The entire process of improving the root system and building adequate food reserves has significant and direct positive results on your plants. Below are a few of the reasons your landscape and lawn should be properly fed every fall:



1. The healthier root systems of fall-fed plants are deeper and more extensive. This allows the plant to better withstand the stress of both heat and drought as the season progresses. In drought conditions - especially when temperatures are also high - the plant loses a tremendous amount of moisture into the atmosphere from evaporation (with turf this loss can amount to 97% of all the water absorbed by the roots). Weak or shallow roots are often unable to keep up with the demands of the plant. This results in plant stress, generally poor performance, and increased susceptibility to disease and insect damage.
2. Heavy fall feeding increases resistance to some cool-weather fungus diseases by maintaining better overall plant health. Potassium in particular has been found to assist in increasing disease resistance.
3. Improved winter color of both turf and evergreens is also directly related to food availability in the fall. On turf, this is greatly affected by fall mowing practices. Grass left very long in the fall tends to fall over on itself and is much more prone to winter disease invasion as well as a browning of all the ends of the grass blades.
4. Well-fed plants don't dry out as much through winter. Proper feeding increases water-holding ability. The cells of the plant become turgid - or stiff with water. The difference is similar to that between a balloon full of water and one that is empty or only partially full. The cell walls are more rigid and better able to withstand the drying and browning effects of colder winter winds and temperatures. Increased turgidity - or water levels - also reduces winter wear and tear to dormant or semi-dormant lawns caused by foot traffic.
5. Good fall fertilization programs can also improve blooming performance of some flowering trees and shrubs.
6. Density (or thickness) in your lawn is also improved. Although the results will not usually be seen until spring, there is a direct relationship between the health, size and depth of the root system and the density of the lawn. Most turf varieties form new shoots from the tillers and rhizomes (surface stems and roots) of the grass plant, which are improved and increased by a heavy feeding in the fall.

Although proper fall feeding is just one part of a good overall annual program, it's very important and often underrated. Many people see fall feeding as an optional "snack before bed" for their landscape plants. This is a misconception. Fall feeding is probably the most important feeding of the entire year since it has a direct effect on plant performance through the whole next season.

As with the growth and health of people and animals, both your lawn and landscape need regular, healthy food to maintain vigor, fight off sickness, and discourage pests. Although the feeding cycles are different between people and plants, it's just as true that depriving your valuable landscape plants of proper nourishment when they need it the most will lead to much poorer performance and possibly higher maintenance costs in the long run.

Caterpillar Culprit

Walking up to our front door a few days ago, sitting on the door handle was a caterpillar. This caterpillar is not something you want to see because seeing one means there are many feeding on plant material somewhere on your property. This large, orange caterpillar with tufts of black hair is the illustrious *Oleander Caterpillar*.

Oleander caterpillars hatch from eggs that have been laid under plant leaves. The caterpillars got their name because they prefer to feed on Oleander leaves, but don't let the name fool you: they can and will eat other plant material, like the Desert Rose or Mandeville Vine. We found an army of Oleander caterpillars on our property attacking our Mandeville vines. Looking back, we should have recognized the signs before seeing the caterpillar itself.

Signs that the Oleander caterpillars are feeding on your plants:

- Black droppings on the ground around a plant
- Webs within the plant itself with black droppings in it
- Black droppings piled on top of individual leaves
- Plant material looking weak and/or bare

If you recognize any of these signs or see an actual caterpillar, you will want to get rid of the pests as soon as possible. Oleander caterpillars can defoliate a plant within days. Usually the plant will not die but not tending to this nuisance will create an infestation that can be hard to control. Plant material that has had Oleander caterpillars feeding on it can over time become weak which opens the door for other insects, stresses and diseases.

Cutting off the plant material along with the caterpillars and disposing of them in a trash bag can lessen the caterpillar population. Use gloves when handling oleanders, as these plants contain a poisonous sap and the caterpillars themselves can cause an itchy rash. Calling your landscape professional to treat the plant material is important. They will treat the caterpillars that you do not see and the eggs that have been laid under the leaves of the plant.



Oleander Caterpillar droppings



Oleander Caterpillar



Mushrooms Q & A

Why are there mushrooms growing in the same circles each year on my turf?

Mushrooms are often the visible results of wood rotting underground. There might have been a tree cut down and the stump and roots are decomposing underground, or the wood could be from a fence post, wood chips from a planting bed, boarder board remnants, etc.

Do mushrooms grow from warm temperatures and humidity?

Yes, some mushrooms are caused by weather. Mushrooms love wet, warm, dark places and these mushrooms should disappear when the weather moves to sunny and dry.

Can I prevent mushrooms?

The best way to remove mushrooms is by mowing them down and putting the clippings in a bag. Mow the areas with mushrooms last so you will not carry the fungus spores to other areas. Mushrooms are usually not affected by fungicides and fungicides are not approved for controlling mushrooms. Digging up the buried wood will help but can also spread mushroom spores as you are digging. Decrease shade by trimming trees and/or shades, and increase drainage by aerating and de-thatching turf.

Mushrooms are a the reproductive part of the fungi living in the soil. The fungi stay hidden while breaking down organic matter but when conditions are just right, they will come out. Mushrooms are proof that you have a great deal of organic matter in your soil... and this is a GOOD thing!



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**Commercial and Office Parks | Homeowner Associations and Condominiums
Industrial Sites | Residential Properties**

Defined by our horticultural expertise and superior workmanship, Coastal Greenery will customize your landscape program to suit your site and budget requirements. Visit us online to learn more and view our portfolio, or call to schedule a consultation with our property management team.

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