

# Green Garden News

## Protect Trees from Power Mower Blight

Ever heard a tree scream? You might have if you'd listened closely and your lawn mower hadn't been so loud.

Jim Midcap, an Extension Service horticulturist with the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, says trees planted in turf areas are always in danger of what he calls "power mower blight."

"Power mower blight is caused mostly by well-meaning, dedicated turf-clippers who vow to cut every blade of grass and not resort to such things as hand-held shears," Midcap said. "In close-quarters combat with a power mower, the tree generally loses."

Trees may not scream very loudly, but that doesn't mean the wounds gashed open by lawn mowers, and sometimes power trimmers, aren't real injuries. The gouging edges of mowers can seriously hurt trees, especially young ones.

"This wounding lays open sensitive inner tissue and can allow insects and diseases to attack," Midcap said.

"Insects, in fact, will generally attack a tree in poor health. And creating an open wound is asking for trouble."

A jagged wound will heal poorly, he said. It will allow the tree's vigor to decline and make it more susceptible to such stressful times as drought or extreme cold.

What really makes power mower blight so bad, Midcap said, is that it's al-

ways avoidable.

"You just need to take precautions to protect the tree," he said.

"Three small wooden or steel stakes or some type of short fencing placed close to the tree trunk will help fend off the cold steel."

But perhaps an even better way to protect the tree, he said, is to mulch under the tree's drip line.

"This will define the mower area," he said. "It will modify the root zone environment under it, too, by keeping it cool and moist in the summer."

Mulching helps three ways:

1. It protects the tree from the mower.
2. It helps create a healthier environment for the tree.
3. It enables the dedicated clipper to cut every blade of grass and keep that perfectly manicured look around the tree.

Ground pine or hardwood bark, pine straw and leaf mold, or compost, are all good mulches, Midcap said. Just place a 2- to 3-inch thickness of the mulch under the tree.

Expand the mulch area as the tree grows if you like. But don't use too much. Most weeds and encroaching turf can be easily controlled with herbicides.

"Mulching, staking or fencing young trees around your lawn isn't a

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# June Garden Tips

## Flowers

- Annuals to plant include celosia, coleus, crossandra, hollyhock, impatiens, kalanchoe, nicotiana, ornamental pepper, portulaca, salvia, torenia, vinca and zinnia.
- Remove old blooms (deadheading) to make flowers bloom longer.
- Allow the foliage on spring bulbs to grow. Do not cut it off until it turns yellow and falls over.

## Trees and Shrubs

- Mature palms should receive an application of granular fertilizer. Use a special palm fertilizer that has an 8-2-12 +4Mg (magnesium) with micronutrients formulation. Apply one pound of fertilizer per 100 sqft of canopy area or landscape area.
- Do any necessary pruning of junipers this month.
- Finish pruning the spring flowering shrubs such as azaleas, camellias, spiraeas, wisteria and forsythia by early June.
- Check mulch around ornamental plants to be sure it's two inches thick. Add mulch as needed to help keep weeds down and conserve water. Keep mulch one to two inches away from trunk or stem
- Inspect maple trees, especially silver maple for infestations of maple soft scale. Look for a white substance with some black on one end. Individual maple scales are about 1/4 inch in diameter and resemble bird droppings. They occur mostly on leaves and can cause defoliation unless controlled.
- Inspect the undersides of azalea leaves for spider mites and lace bugs. If dry weather conditions exist, these insects can do some serious damage if not controlled.
- Check conifers for signs of bagworms. Call your local Extension Service for control measures.

## Vegetable Garden

- Sidedress vegetable gardens with fertilizer containing nitrogen and potassium. A fertilizer such as a 15-0-15 can be used. Use approximately 2-3 cups (1 to 1 ½ pounds) per 100 feet of row.
- Increase watering frequency and amount as tomatoes load up with fruit.
- Vegetables that can be planted outdoors include eggplant, lima beans, okra, southern peas, peppers and sweet potatoes.

- Sweet potatoes are started from plants or "draws". Be sure to purchase only certified weevil free sweet potato plants.
- Check for the following pests and control them if necessary: tomato fruitworm, stinkbugs on vegetables and aphids on all new growth

## Lawns

- Summer can bring lawn pests. Monitor for pests on a regular basis.
- Sod webworms probably won't kill a healthy lawn, but they can make it look like it has been cut too short. Look closely to see if leaf blades have been chewed away.
- Spittlebugs can damage centipede lawns when populations become excessive. These small dark black insects, with two orange strips across the back, cause yellow and reddish streaks down the grass blades which eventually turn brown.
- Chinch bug damage in St. Augustine lawns appears as straw-colored areas, usually in full sun. These tiny insects are black with white wing patches on their backs.
- Time for mole cricket control. Use the soap flush technique to determine if sufficient crickets are present to warrant treatment.
- To aide in detection of caterpillars, mole crickets, and chinch bugs during peak infestation periods, a soap drench may be useful. Mix 1 ½ ounces of liquid dishwashing soap and 2 gallons of water in a sprinkling can, then equally distribute the solution in a 2 X 2 foot area. The soap solution is irritating to the insects and they crawl around more and can be easily seen.
- Contact your local Extension Office for recommendations on how to control lawn pests. Use lawn insecticides only if they are needed.
- Mow the lawn when needed. Letting it go too long between mowings can harm the grass
- Keep lawn mower blades sharp. This reduces some disease problems and gives the lawn a neater look when it is cut.
- Lawns will begin experiencing more stress as temperatures rise this summer. Raise the mowing height one-half inch as hot weather approaches. This helps relieve some stress and enables the grass better tolerate summer conditions.

# Prepare the Landscape for Storms

June marks the beginning of hurricane season, and it's important to understand powerful hurricanes can affect the entire state.

As you make your plans, remember there are things that need to be done to prepare a landscape for the possibility of storm and things to do when a storm threatens.

**Check Trees Now.** Trees with trunks that show significant decay and threaten a home or other important structure should be removed – even if they made it through past hurricanes. Trees that are leaning significantly also should be evaluated for possible removal. Remember, too, that large trees can impact more than just your property, so you should consider how your trees might affect neighboring properties as well as your own.

In addition, look for branches that hang over the house near the roof. Although the branches may not be touching the roof under normal conditions, the high winds of violent storms or hurricanes can cause trees to bend and branches to flail around considerably. These branches can cause extensive damage to the roof and generally should be removed.

Normally it is best to have this kind of work done by a professional – a licensed arborist. Arborists are trained individuals who make a career of caring for the urban forest. Some arborists are self-employed, while others work for tree-care companies, municipalities or public parks. The areas in which arborists can help you include planting, transplanting, pruning, fertilizing, pest management (such as spraying for caterpillars or treating for termites), tree removal, value appraisals and protecting trees during construction.

Another thing to do is to consider staking young trees – those planted in the past few years – since they can be easily blown over by high winds. This will save work straightening and supporting them after a storm if it does blow them over.

**Getting Ready.** While those are some of the things to do well before a storm, you also need to take action in your lawn and landscape if a storm is approaching.

If it looks like a hurricane is likely to head your way, secure loose objects in the landscape. Look around your grounds for container plants, hanging baskets, tools, lawn furniture (including porch swings), toys, bicycles, bird feeders, wind chimes, barbecue grills, playhouses and doghouses. These

items can become destructive missiles during high winds and should be stored indoors – in garages or sheds – or anchored securely in place.

If you are the organized sort, well before a hurricane threatens make a list of things that need to be brought inside and where to put them. Also, make a list of things that need to be tied down. Buy the necessary equipment, including anchors. Estimate how long it will take to secure things. You can make these lists part of your family's emergency plan.

Pesticides and motor fuels should be stored in areas that are secure and higher than potential flood waters. These products can be hazardous if flood waters spread them through your home or garage.

**Harvest Vegetables.** If you have a vegetable garden, harvest all vegetables that you can before a storm hits to get them out of harm's way. There will likely be little left if high winds occur. And produce covered by flood water will have to be discarded.

**Take Care Of Water Gardens.** Aquatic gardens also need some attention if a storm is approaching. Aquatic plants in pots are often set on bricks, cinder blocks and other supports to boost them to the proper level in the pond. These potted plants should all be set on the bottom of the pond until the hurricane passes.

In addition, you may want to consider bringing valuable fish, such as expensive koi, inside in a large bucket of water dipped from the pond to protect them.

Fountains should be turned off and secured, and electrical cords should be unplugged, rolled up and secured.

**Be Prepared.** As you make your plans for how to get ready for an approaching hurricane, prioritize what you need to do so important tasks are done first. If your area is put under a hurricane watch, begin to do what is needed to prepare your landscape for the storm.

Keep in mind you won't have time to focus on your landscape once a hurricane warning is announced, and you certainly won't have time for it if evacuations are called for. When preparing to evacuate, if time permits, be sure to water your indoor plants before you leave.

—By Dan Gill, LSU AgCenter Horticulturist

# Upcoming Events

**Plant Clinics:** Having problems with your lawn or plants? If so, take advantage of diagnostic plant clinics offered by the UF/IFAS Santa Rosa County Extension and the Santa Rosa County Master Gardeners. Plant clinics are now offered at all three Santa Rosa County Extension Offices.

In Milton, the plant clinic will be conducted every Monday during the summer from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Extension office located at 6263 Dogwood Drive, Milton.

In Gulf Breeze, the plant clinic is conducted every Tuesday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. year round. The clinic is held at the South Santa Rosa Service Center located at 5841 Gulf Breeze Parkway (next to The Zoo on Hwy 98).

In Jay, the plant clinic will be staffed by Santa Rosa County Master Gardeners on the first and third Monday of each month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. during the summer months. The clinic will be held at the Extension Office located in the Jay Community Center at 5259 Booker Lane, Jay.

**Panhandle Butterfly House** . The Panhandle Butterfly House, located in Navarre Park at the

north end of the Navarre Bridge on Hwy 98 is open for the season. Flutter by and see our redesigned gardens and be surrounded by butterflies.

The Panhandle Butterfly House will be open to the public on Thursdays-Saturday from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM and on Sundays from noon to 4:00 PM.

Scheduled group tours for 15 or more people are available. Call 850-623-3868 or scheduling.

Go to [www.panhandlebutterflyhouse.org](http://www.panhandlebutterflyhouse.org) for more information.

**June 21, 2007: Florida Lawn Field Day.** Join us for the premier of a turf field day specially designed for homeowners. 8:00 am to 2 pm at the West Florida Research and Education Center. \$15 pre-registration fee (lunch is included). Call 850-983-5216 ext. 113 for more information.

For persons with disabilities requiring special accommodations, please contact the SRC Extension Office at least 5 working days prior to the program so that proper consideration may be given to the request.  
(850) 623-3868

## Florida Lawn Field Day

The First Annual Florida Lawn Field Day for homeowners is scheduled for June 21, 2007 from 8:00 am to 2:00 pm. Hosted by the West Florida Research and Education Center and held at the Jay Research Facility, this field day will provide you the most up-to-date information on many issues that homeowners face with their lawns.

Topics include:

- Those Darn Bird Dogs are Killing My Lawn Again: Mr. Larry Williams and Mr. Dan Mullins
- Rain, Rain, Don't Go Away – But Please Don't Let Those Sprinklers Run Anyway! :Mr. Phil Moon
- The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: Insects in Turf: Ms. Beth Bolles
- Brown Patch, Yellow Patch, Green Patch, Blue Patch: What are all These Patches in my Lawn: Ms. Theresa Friday

- My Lawn is the Best Weed Patch in the Neighborhood: What Should I Do?: Dr. Ken Hutto
- Dark-green, Green-green, Yellow-green: Understanding Lawn Fertilization: Dr. Laurie Trenholm
- 1,000 Different Turf Varieties – I Didn't Know There Were So Many: Dr. J. Bryan Unruh

You can register online at [http://wfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/turf\\_expo/reg\\_lawnexpo.htm](http://wfrec.ifas.ufl.edu/turf_expo/reg_lawnexpo.htm) or on the day of the event. Registration fee is \$15 if you pre-register and \$20 on the day of the event. Lunch is included in your registration fee.

For more information call Robin Vickers at 850-983-5216 ext. 113.

# Questions and Answers

**Q: About four weeks ago, we planted red pentas, and all were doing fine until recently when some started producing brown stems and dying. What could be wrong?**

**A:** Dig down and check the root balls; this sounds like a case of dry roots. Often the plants remain in their root balls, and the soil becomes dry and hard to rewet. If this is the case, extra waterings would be all you need to save the rest of the plantings.

It also might help to create berms around the edges of the roots balls to direct the water through the root systems and then into the surrounding soil.

**Q: After the flowers fade from day lily plants, and I remove the blooms, should I also cut off the stem? How long should the plants produce flowers?**

**A:** There is no value in allowing the declining stems to remain on the plants once all the blooms have faded. Some stems might support plump green pods if the flowers were pollinated. You could leave these to turn yellowish-brown and pop open if you want to try growing more plants from seed.

Otherwise, these too can be removed and all the day lily's energies can be directed into growing more plants.

Day lilies can be in bloom spring through early summer if you grow a selection of varieties. One plant normally sends up several flowering shoots with many buds that can keep it in bloom for a month or more. Of course, each bloom lasts only a day.

**Q: The palms in our community have been trimmed, leaving three to four fronds. In my yard, I have always waited until they turn brown to remove the fronds, but even green ones were removed. What is best?**

**A:** Someone does not seem to be getting the message that plants, including palms, need their leaves to produce food for survival. Giving palms what is called the "hurricane cut" to leave a few upright leaves has become a standard practice that

should be avoided.

Companies suggest this makes their work easier because after the severe pruning, they do not have to return until the following year. It might help with their work, but it does not help the palms.

University of Florida recommendations are to prune any brown or declining fronds plus those that might be in the way of traffic or care. You also may remove flowering or fruiting stalks at the same time. Otherwise, allow the palms to keep their green and show their real beauty.

**Q: I have some yellow leaf blades scattered throughout in my St. Augustine lawn. Should I be treating for chinch bugs, brown patch or something?**

**A:** Scattered yellow leaf blades normally do not indicate a pest problem. More likely, these are remnants of a winter-weary lawn or the results of heat or drought stress. Check first to make sure the lawn is getting its fair share of water and appropriate fertilizer.

If you see patches of yellow grass blades and maybe some browning too, then you have to check for pests. It's getting too hot for brown patch, so chinch bugs would be suspect.

Part the grass blades at the edge of a green and yellow spot, and look for the pin-head-size black adults, often with white-crossed wings, near the ground line. If present, then make the needed treatment.

Problem spots also can be checked at your local University of Florida Extension office. The agent or master gardener is going to need a square foot of sod 2 inches thick taken from the edge of a good and bad spot to make a good diagnosis.



# Power Mower Blight

(Continued from page 1)

lot of work," Midcap said. "But it can make a lot of difference in the health of your trees."

—By Dan Rahn, University of Georgia, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences



## Change in the Green Garden News

Extension Horticulture Faculty from the Northwest Florida District are working together to produce a bi-monthly newsletter for the entire district. The new newsletter will replace the monthly Green Garden News.

The newsletter will still contain many of the columns you enjoy in my Green Garden News but will include the writings from other UF Specialists and other Extension Agents.

Expect to see the premier issue in early July.



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