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Campbell Vaughn: Now is the time to start preparing your lawns for cooler weather

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

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It is almost Labor Day and like it or not, summer is coming to a close.

This year's summer has certainly been different than most since it didn't start until July and then hit us with a vengeance. It has been very hot and humid with not a whole lot of rain for the past couple of weeks until this hurricane. Although, I did have 1.75 inches last Sunday evening. I know I have been mowing my grass every five days because it is growing great.

As we move from swimming pools to some football, I thought I would discuss some things we can do this time of year to get ready for plants to start slowing down and handling cooler weather on the horizon.

Since we do have a decent amount of time left in the growing season, there are things we can do to prolong the inevitable.

Raise your lawnmower blade about a half of an inch on bermuda lawns to keep them green. With all the rain we have had, you can add a little more nitrogen to Bermuda and zoysia lawns, but do it lightly and do it now. I like 15-0-15 or 16-4-8. If you wait any longer, fertilizing will put the grass into turbo mode when it needs to be slowing down.

We are going to see fungus in St. Augustine and in zoysia. This rain will make for some great growing conditions for fungi. Large patch fungus should start a little early so be on the lookout. You can treat now and again in mid-September. There is a great product called Scott's Disease EX that has a very good fungicide ingredient that is found in some commercial products called azoxystrobin. It is a great general-purpose chemical for fungus control. If you see a little yellowing in specific areas in the grass, treat it before it gets out of control.

If you missed March and June preemergence in your lawn, I am sure you are battling weeds. Try and treat some of the weeds before they produce seed or spread by rhizomes. I continually am battling chamberbitter by spot spraying with Celsius herbicide. Annual weeds

will die when we get a good frost, but perennial weeds will sit idle and be ready to jump when we warm up in the spring. Beating the perennial weeds back now is a good idea. Virginia buttonweed is a good example of a pesky weed that Celsius will beat down fairly well.

Campbell Vaughn: How to help plants stressed by extreme heat

There are a lot of good chemicals to kill weeds in the lawn, but make sure you find the right one for the type of turf you have. For instance, 2,4-d is a great herbicide for broadleaf weeds in bermuda and zoysia but it will burn the heck out of St. Augustine and centipede.

Sept. 15 is the date we suggest to put out preemergence for cool season weeds in Bermuda, zoysia and St. Augustine. Poa annua, henbit and dandelions can take over in winter, so make sure to take charge before these weeds do. I like 0-0-7 with pendimethalin or prodiamine as a preemergence because it has 7% potassium. Potassium is good for root growth and our soils don't hold that element readily.

Both active ingredients are good general purpose weed suppressant. There are plenty of other preemergence products out there that can do a good job for you. If you are ambitious, mark on the calendar to add preemergence again in mid-December to get late winter germinating weeds.

Don't be afraid to use preemergence in your flower beds as well. I have seen 85% weed reduction in flower and shrub beds from using these chemicals. Products like Barricade and Preen are great. Just remember that these chemicals kill seeds so if you are planting something by seeding, be careful and read the label on the bag before you apply.

Summer growing season is coming to an end, but landscapes never seem to stop. Spend a little time now and save yourself a lot of work this winter and spring.