

The Augusta Chronicle

COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Is your lawn ready for fall? Try these five tips to keep it looking good.

Campbell Vaughn Columnist

Published 3:51 a.m. ET Sept. 19, 2024 | Updated 3:51 a.m. ET Sept. 19, 2024

Fall is here and it is time to transition from pools to football, beaches to deer stands and boats to fireplaces.

The landscapes know that cooler weather is on the way and have begun its gradual slow down. We have been mild these past couple of weeks compared to some of the miserably hot Labor Days in the past few years. I will call it a blessing.

I have a five-part to do list to help with moving your yard into autumn.

In our lawns, middle September is our go-to date for our fall application of preemergence for cool season weeds. Annual blue grass (*Poa annua*), henbit, dandelions and the dreaded lawn burweed can run amuck in the winter, so get the weeds before these weeds get you.

I like 0-0-7 Weed Preventers as a preemergence because it contains 7% potassium to go along with a good general-purpose herbicide. Potassium is good for root health and our soils seem to constantly need replenishment of this element. There is a gazillion other preemergence on the market, so if you have been battling a particular winter weed for a while, give another product a try this year.

It is time to quit adding nitrogen fertilizers to your warm season grasses. Lawns are ready to start transitioning into dormancy, so any nitrogen can induce a flush that can cause harm if we get an early frost. You can get a little more time out of the lawns if you raise your blade on your mower about one-half of an inch.

If you are looking to have a green lawn by overseeding with ryegrass, I don't recommend it unless you have a ballfield or a grazing pasture. Rye is nice to add green to your landscape in the winter, but it competes too negatively with the overall health of the turf to justify it.

If you are planning on overseeding any other grass but Bermuda, get rid of those thoughts. Bermuda is the only grass where it is acceptable. If you don't listen to my recommendations and do decide to apply winter rye, the next few weeks are ideal to get your lawn prepped.

Campbell Vaughn: As the season turns to fall, keep an eye out for sourwood trees

Do not apply preemergence like I mentioned in the first part. Mow the bermuda lower than normal over the next two cuttings. Bag your clipping and never cut off more than one-third of the grass blade. Mid-September to mid-October is the time to apply the seed.

Make sure the turf is free of debris so the rye seed can make good contact with the soil. Perennial rye is preferred over an annual variety.

Perennial rye is treated like an annual, but it has better turf properties including good wear tolerance, quicker germination and a darker green color. It may cost a little more, but it is worth a few extra dollars. Use a rate of 8-10 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet. Make sure to keep the soil moist until the seed is completely germinated even if this means watering lightly once or even twice daily. Wait until November when the bermuda has gone dormant to fertilize. Using 2-4 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet is all the fertilizer you will need. Keep your mower running well, because you will need it.

Be mindful of pruning. Mop head hydrangea is ideally pruned on the first of August, but you can probably get away with cutting them back now. I wouldn't butcher them, but pruning out some leggy areas should be fine. Don't you dare cut oakleaf hydrangea back. I will personally come to your house and give you a look of disappointment. I don't like ever cutting oakleaf hydrangea back unless they are way outgrowing their space.

Azaleas, gardenias and camellias have set their buds for spring blooms, so only prune diseased and unruly limbs. I prefer to avoid heavy pruning on evergreen plants like cleyera, ligustrum, boxwoods and pittosporum this time of year because when they do get a good flush. The tender new leaves are susceptible to damage from a hard freeze. You might be okay for now, but don't wait too much longer.

The last of the list of five is to find a good preemergence to add to your flower and shrub beds. Products like Preen, Amaze and Barricade do a great job of keeping your beds weed free. I see as much as 85% reduction in annual weeds when these preemergence herbicides are applied in timely manners.

The yard work isn't quite done yet. These items will help avoid some messes that will show their heads come spring.