

## COLUMNS

# Campbell Vaughn: Fall is nearly here, so follow this to-do list to keep your lawns looking good

**Campbell Vaughn** Augusta Chronicle

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### Key Points AI-assisted summary ⓘ

- Homeowners should apply pre-emergence products in the fall to prevent winter weeds.
  - Fall is an ideal time to use baits to control fire ant populations before they become a larger issue.
  - Despite dry conditions, mosquitoes carrying West Nile virus are still a threat, so take precautions.
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We're transitioning from summer to fall this month, so it is a good time to discuss some things that need to get done in your yards.

We went from being soaking wet to bone dry in no time. The low humidity and milder temperatures are nice for being outside, but turf grass is turning brown, and plants are starting to wilt.

The brutal heat in July stressed plants hard this season, and less tree canopy due to Hurricane Helene added some serious sun to plants that may have had some protection in years past. If you include the much-needed rain with the imminent cool-season slowdown, don't be surprised if your landscape looks haggard.

In my yard, I have been adding supplemental water for the past couple of weeks. My birdbath needs filling at least every four days. I am trying to water deeply when I do irrigate, but the top 2 inches are drying quickly.

The next couple of weeks are a good time to do a few seasonal chores. Get those pre-emergence products out to keep the winter poa annua and lawn burweed in check. If you can get one with 0-0-7 fertilizer, the 7% potassium is good for root health. Make sure not to use a preemergent herbicide if you are planning on overseeding with rye grass. We are done fertilizing the turf with nitrogen until next spring, so don't be tempted when those bags go on sale in the next few weeks.

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If you have St. Augustine or zoysia grass, fall is a time when brown patch fungus becomes active. The dry weather is helping slow the disease down, but when it does start raining again and the temperature begins dropping, the fungus will rear its ugly head.

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I get it every year, and it frustrates me. I will preventively treat the fungus this week with Scott's Disease EX. If the disease starts to move after the treatment, I will switch to something a little more potent, like Heritage or Headway.

Brown patch starts as a small circle in the grass, usually with an 8-12" diameter, and begins spreading out. The margins turn yellow, and the interior of the circle will look puny. Since grass is going dormant soon, the turf won't have much time to recover, and you will have small to medium "stained" grass until spring. Brown patch rarely kills, but it is unsightly. It also tends to affect St. Augustine the worst.

Now is a great time to use baits to kill fire ants. The idea is to spread the fire ant bait over a large area, and the fire ants will forage to find it. They return to the nest and share with the queen. The queen dies, and the nest collapses. Amdro Fire Ant bait is a good one that is commonly found in stores around town and will cover about 1.5 acres. For larger areas, Extinguish Plus will come in a 25-pound bag and will cover around 15 acres.

These products aren't meant to be put on top of a mound, but to spread all over and let the ants find it. When you put the bait out for the ants, it needs to be dry out for a couple of days. If the bait gets wet, it will spoil, and ants won't feed on it. April is the other best time to apply fire ant baits.

There is still time to prune the blue mop head hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), but do it soon. Do not cut oakleaf hydrangea back since they are earlier to flower in the spring. I don't like cutting them back at all if you can handle the size of the oakleaf. On limelight-type hydrangeas, wait to prune them in February. Azaleas, gardenias, and camellias have set their buds for upcoming spring and early summer blooms, so be careful not to cut off the parts that make them so spectacular in the coming months. As for other evergreen plants that have insignificant flowers, you can prune some now, but avoid heavy pruning on plants like boxwoods and pittosporum much later than now, because when they do get a good flush, the tender new leaves are susceptible to damage from a hard freeze.

One other note, I found out that a long-time friend of mine's mother contracted West Nile virus locally, and it has put her in a terrible situation. West Nile is spread through the bite of an infected mosquito. Even with the dry conditions we have right now, I am seeing a lot of mosquitoes. Please use insect repellants, wear long sleeves, and use your Thermacells when hanging around outdoors.