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# THE GREEN INFORMANT

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(517) 627-9669 ■ Fax (517) 626-2645 ■ E-mail: [dlblawntech@starband.net](mailto:dlblawntech@starband.net)

Summer 2006

## SUMMER IS UPON US!

### LAWN TECH STAFF

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Spring to summer weather was the typical roller coaster pattern we are accustomed to experiencing in Michigan. Early rains in May were welcomed, but by the end of June soil moisture was not to be found.

Daily watering through our summer months is more important than any other time of year. This ensures the results of your lawn care efforts are noticed. See our watering tips in this newsletter edition.

Grubs were again a hot topic this spring. Damage was evident from the grub activity last fall. Customers who had severe grub damage may experience increased beetle activity on trees, shrubs and/or lawns in your neighborhood through the end of June and July. Timing for Merit or Grub-X products should be applied now to prevent adult grub damage to your turf this fall of 2006. If you are unsure what to do, please call our office.

Many customers called the past few weeks in reference to the appearance of their turf. Turf density was down and the grass was stiff or had a prickly feel to it. Grass plants at the time were stemming to support the seed head in which they were going to produce. This is a natural occurrence and will be short lived with turf returning to its natural state in a couple of weeks.

Tree and shrub care season is upon also. Lawn Tech offers a tree and shrub program that can be tailored to your landscape. Weather patterns

dictate timing of applications and, depending on your landscape plants, insect and disease sprays or deep-root feeding may be needed. All tree & shrub care is 80% preventative so that problems do not occur. Curative measures can be done to prohibit further outbreak or potential loss of plant material. Call today and ask for Ron or Dan to check over your landscape.

As fuel prices have soared and affected us all, Lawn Tech does its best to maximize the day-to-day operations with minimal disruption of service. To accomplish this, however, you may experience:

- Increased costs for services provided;
- Slight delays of an extra day or two to do a requested estimate or receive a call back to maximize our routing;
- Slight delays in customer requests or needs; or
- Increased telephone contact as we do our best to handle your concerns over the phone versus an on-site service call.

We do our best to accommodate your needs and we greatly appreciate your patience. Lawn Tech values each customer and we strive to exceed your expectations in this growing and competitive market.

Lawn Tech wishes your family an eventful and restful summer and just leave your lawn and landscape needs to us!

**Dan Boak**

Dan Boak  
Owner

### IN THIS ISSUE . . .

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- Landscaping Corner
- \$20 Referral Coupon

# LANDSCAPING CORNER

## MULCHING: JUST DO IT!

*Bert Cregg, Horticulture and Forestry*

Several of our Extension educators report getting a number of calls and questions regarding landscape mulch; How much? What's the best mulch? And so on.

Over the past few years we've conducted a trial on several mulch types in replicated mini-landscapes at the MSU Horticulture Teaching and Research Center. The mulches we used were ground pine bark, hardwood bark, cypress mulch and ground pallets (the ubiquitous red mulch). We also included two treatments without mulch; either with or without weed control. The take-home message from the research is the properly applied mulch consistently improves soil moisture availability, weed control and plant growth compared to plots without mulch, even if the plots were kept weed free. Most of the mulches worked equally well. Plants in the cypress bark plots grew a little slower and had lower rates of photosynthesis than the other mulches, but were still ahead of the mulch-free plots. So the final decision on the

choice of mulch for most homeowners and landscapers will come down to a matter of cost and aesthetics.

The advantages of organic mulches (improved soil properties, ease of application) usually outweigh the advantages of inorganic mulches such as river rock or white rock.

Two to three inches of mulch is adequate – more is not better.

Don't pile mulch around the base of trees (the dreaded mulch volcano) – keep a 6-inch mulch-free ring around trees.

Don't use uncomposted grass clippings or leaves as mulch – they will form a thick, smelly, unsightly mat that inhibits moisture and oxygen movement to plant roots.

*Curt Boak*  
Landscape Designer

## DROUGHT STRESS COMES EARLY FOR TREES

*Bert Cregg, Horticulture and Forestry*  
June 2006

On top of the drought we experience last year, 2006 is also shaping up as a dry year. Landscape trees in Michigan usually experience low soil moisture and drought stress at some point during the summer, particularly in July and August. This year, however, our current weather pattern may cause trees to experience drought stress earlier than usual. Trees that are well established in the landscape can withstand a fair amount of drought stress without long term consequence. Newly planted trees, on the other hand, are another matter.

Balled-in-burlap and container grown trees that have been planted this spring are just beginning to re-establish root-soil contact and extend their roots into the planting backfill. The more rapidly trees can establish new roots the more likely they are able to withstand the rigors of transplanting and become established in the landscape. Because of this, newly planted trees are especially vulnerable to these early drought events.

As long as the current dry weather persists, trees that have been planted this spring should be watered at least once a week. As always, a good soaking once a week is better than a light watering every couple of days. As shown in the figure in the article on conifer needle drop, potential evaporation in mid-Michigan averages about 1" to 1.25" during most of the summer. Adding this amount of irrigation per week should meet water needs for most landscape plants. For newly planted trees, irrigation bags or TreeGators are an excellent means to give trees a long-slow soaking, especially on clay soils where water is prone to run off.

## TURFGRASS SEED HEADS

*Kevin Frank, MSU Professor,*  
*Crop & Soil Sciences*  
May 2006

Seed heads are starting to appear in big numbers in lawn this week. This is a normal occurrence that happens every May across Michigan. Most of the common turfgrass found in lawns produce seed heads including Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass and of course *Poa annua* (otherwise known as annual bluegrass).

Seed heads not only detract from the appearance of the turf but the seed stalks are tough to mow so make sure you have a sharp mower blade. However, even with a sharp blade you still may see a sheen or whitish look to the turf after mowing due to the seed stalks. Resist the urge to try and mow down the seed heads by lowering the mowing height. Any golfer out there will tell you that *Poa annua* can produce seed heads at putting green mowing height, so lowering the mowing height on the lawn is not a recommended approach.

Some things to watch for over the next couple of weeks as the seed heads hit peak. The turf may start to look stemy and lose density. This is natural. It will come back strong once this period of seed head production ends. Basically right now the plant is putting a lot of energy into popping those seed heads. Once it's done, the growth and density should return to normal levels.

## YOUR GRUB UPDATE

By mid-May, grubs are done feeding and are pupating and turning into beetles. By mid-June, these beetles will be flying around the area.

Because grubs are primarily done feeding in mid-May, any applications are not recommended. Watering and re-seeding efforts can be done now to restore damaged turf. Your next window of application to prevent grubs this fall and next spring is in late-June and July with an application of Merit, Mach 2 or Arena (for homeowners: Bayer Seacon Long Control or GrubEx) to lawns with a history of grub problems. Be sure to water these products into the soil and follow all label directions.

## DO'S & DO NOTS OF MOWING AND WATERING

### Do's

- Mow lawn at a height of 3" to 3.5"
- Water lawn daily up to a 1/4", this may need to be done in two cycles depending on soil types.
- Mow lawn as often as needed, twice a week to alleviate heavy grass clippings is not out of the question.
- Use a pie tin, rain gauge or the like to measure the quantity of water applied and to adjust the length of time needed to apply 1/4" of water daily.
- Mowing your lawn at a higher height will prevent weed and crabgrass activity.
- Return grass clippings
- Have a summer tune up on your irrigation system to ensure proper coverage and properly working heads.

### DON'T

- Do not over water lawn. If your irrigation system does not have a rain sensor, have one installed.
- Do not mow your lawn less than 3". Mowing too short will encourage weed activity, leave less turf density thus less greening, will promote heat and drought stress quicker and grass plant roots will be shorter.
- Do not water late into the evening if possible. Grass plants should be dry as they enter the late evening hours to alleviate potential fungus activity.
- Do not mow your lawn with dull mower blades. Dull blades will shred the tips of the grass blade and leave your lawn looking like it has a white haze or cast to it.
- Do not use uncomposted grass clippings or leaves as mulch. Clippings will harbor breeding places for insects such as ants and form a thick, smelly mat that inhibits moisture and oxygen movement to plant roots.