The Grass Is Always Greener

Lawn care can be an expensive and time consuming chore. Alamance County is in the transition zone where we can grow either a cool season grass like tall fescue and or a warm season grass like Bermudagrass. Fescue grows best between September and May unlike bermudagrass that grows best from May through September. It is possible to keep tall fescue looking good through most of the summer, but that usually requires watering. The choice is basically between having green grass in the winter or green grass in the summer.
If You Can’t Beat ‘Em..

This spring I am considering doing something I thought I would never do. I am considering planting bermudagrass seed in my lawn. This will seem strange to the people who know I prefer a fescue lawn so let me explain. Over the past twenty years, I have totally renovated my lawn at least twice. I have killed all the bermudagrass and had a great stand of fescue. Unfortunately after a few years the bermudagrass came back and the fescue tended to fade away. I can and have maintained a nice fescue lawn, but it is a lot of effort. I prefer to spend my time (and money) on my vegetable garden.

Let’s go back to the bermudagrass. I have fought bermudagrass in my flower beds, vegetable garden and lawn for years. It seems to thrive on neglect and over the years we have reached an understanding. If it grows in the garden or flower bed, I will kill it. If it grows in the lawn, fine. That is better than mowing dirt in the summer. Since the fescue in my lawn is almost completely gone, the next step is to sow bermudagrass.

Bermudagrass spreads by both above ground stems (stolons) and underground stems (rhizomes). These above and below ground runners enable the bermudagrass to spread rapidly and take over garden and landscape beds. While this can be an unwanted behavior in most situations, it is a definite advantage for a bermudagrass lawn. Bermudagrass is used on athletic fields because it tolerates wear and traffic and recovers quickly from injury. It is also very drought tolerant and rarely needs irrigation in the summer. The main limitation of bermudagrass is that it won’t tolerate shade. If it does not get full sun, the growth will be thin and weak.

Common bermudagrass is what is found in most Alamance County lawns. It can be spread by stolons, rhizomes or seed. There are improved varieties that can also be seeded that have a finer texture and make a better lawn. Two of the best seeded varieties are Riviera and Yukon. The very best bermudagrass hybrid varieties can only be grown from sod, plugs and sprigs. These varieties include Tifsport and Tifway and are commonly used on golf courses.

If you are interested in learning more about a bermudagrass lawn, we are having a warm season lawn class on April 25. We’ll discuss what is required to establish and maintain a nice warm season lawn. As always, if you have any gardening questions please give me or Chris a call.

~Mark

Here’s a link to more info about bermudagrass: http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/articles/tf0016.aspx
April Garden Tips

Shape up evergreen shrubs now, but avoid shearing, if possible. Shearing encourages dense growth on the outermost part of the plant leaving interior branches shaded and leafless. Hand prune from within, cutting back the longest shoots to a point where they join a main branch. Use a different technique to prune stringy *Nandina domestica*. Cut the longest canes close to the ground. New canes will come up from the base to give this old-fashioned garden staple a fuller look and a place in your modern garden.

Begin spraying fruit trees with a home orchard spray as soon as the flower petals fade. Don’t spray before petal fall or you could run the risk of harming beneficial insects.

Now is the time to begin to fertilize your warm season lawn (Bermudagrass or zoysia). Apply ½ pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. Repeat the application in June and August. Centipede is a different story. It requires much less fertilizer and a lower pH for good growth.

Fertilize established roses when new growth is approximately 2” long. Susceptible plants should be on a regular spray program to control fungus diseases. If you’re a rose lover but hate the thought of adhering to a spray schedule, consider planting one of the many new disease-resistant roses. Call the Cooperative Extension Office for recommendations – 570-6740.

If yours is a cool-season lawn, mowing season is here! Set your mower blade high; at least 3 inches, preferably 3-1/2. Try not to take more than one-third of the blade off when you mow. This may mean mowing more than once a week this time of year.

Leave grass clippings on the lawn! They return nutrients to the soil and reduce the need for additional fertilizer. You can reduce the amount of nitrogen you add to your lawn by as much as one-third if you recycle!

After danger of frost is past – around April 15th – plant seeds of sweet corn, pole beans, lima and snap beans, cantaloupe, cucumbers, summer squash, pumpkins and watermelons.

Wait until the end of the month to plant tomatoes, peppers and eggplant. These do best when night temperatures are a little warmer, closer to 50 degrees. Peppers, especially, prefer things a little warmer. They have a tendency to get cold feet and can be slow growers even after the weather warms, if planted when it’s too cold.

Divide, repot and fertilize houseplants before moving them outdoors for their summer vacation at the end of the month. Remember to go easy on the sunshine, especially at first. A day in the shade will still be brighter than a day inside the house.

When selecting summer annuals, look for short, bushy plants with green leaves, well-developed root systems and more buds than flowers. Tap the plant out of the pot to check for lots of healthy, white roots.
Arbor Gate Plant of the Month

Manchurian Lilac ’Miss Kim’ Syringa pubescens subsp. patula

If you’ve been pining for those romantic lilacs featured in more temperate gardens than yours, cheer up! Syringa pubescens subsp. patula is the lilac to plant in the south. Unlike its cousin, Syringa vulgaris, Manchurian lilac stands up to our summer’s heat and humidity and is resistant to the Powdery Mildew that often plagues that other lilac.

This Manchurian lilac cultivar is a compact, upright, deciduous shrub which grows 4-7’ tall with a similar spread. Lavender to ice blue, sweetly fragrant, single flowers are arranged in dense, terminal clusters that cover the plant in April.

Deadheading immediately after bloom may increase next year’s flower show, but little pruning is ever needed to keep Miss Kim in bounds.

Easily grown in average, medium, well-drained soil in full sun to light shade. Prefers somewhat neutral soils, so you may need to add a little lime if the soil test tells you that the pH is below 7. Find out more at the link:

http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/factsheets/shrubs/syringa_patula.html