

GARDEN SPOT

For a healthy lawn, water lightly but often



MARTY FIGLEY

We garden writers receive a lot of mail about our special subject, and frankly, some of it is very confusing. Take watering the lawns, for instance.

One report says to "avoid light, shallow waterings since these can promote shallow root growth," while another says to water infrequently, but deeply. All of the information agrees that watering during the evening or at night may increase the chance for diseases to occur, therefore, water between noon and 4 p.m.; the lawn is most thirsty then.

We surely had some hot weather last month, and July and August are traditionally pretty hot and dry also, so we must first decide the best way to care for our lawns so they will look the way we want them to look.

If we want a perfect lawn, we must then make that commitment to fertilize regularly, keep weeds under control and water when necessary. If on the other hand we just want green out there, we can eliminate most of the fertilization — once a year is enough.

Fall is an excellent time to allow the

roots to grow strong, and a few weeds here and there in the lawn don't bother us. Grass in the summer will turn brown, but we know that is a temporary thing.

One point to keep in mind: a healthy lawn can better handle the stress of heat, insects, weeds and moisture loss. By using the correct kind of grass seed (or sod) in our zone 5, many problems can be eliminated.

Grasses used in our part of the country are called cool-season grasses because they prefer the moderate temperatures of spring and fall for their best growth. They become dormant during the winter and in the summer if they aren't kept watered when temperatures are very hot. Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass and fine fescues are best suited for us.

I recently spoke with Greg Patchen, Oakland County Extension agent, and he explained that the new thinking about frequent, shallow watering is the best.

Grass roots normally get shorter during the summer months and are only two to three inches long. This is because the grass is growing less vigorously during the summer months.

So light irrigation, applied frequently, will keep the root zone moist, the



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Tree time: Herb Broughton of Franklin recycled trees to make an arbor and seating area on his property.

thatch area will be moist and the organisms in the soil will get busy and keep everything moving and healthy. Heavy watering, especially on our urban lawns with compacted soil, will just run off or go beyond the roots. So, the word is, frequent watering, about one to 1-1/2 inches a week (or 1/4-inch a day) is best.

Personally, I still like a lawn around my house. I don't have to have a perfect lawn — a few weeds don't bother me. I love the violets in the spring. Now if only we could get the English Daisies to grow here!

We know that the new composting law is in effect in many communities, so I urge you to compost, compost, compost. A mulching mower allows grass clippings to be left on the ground and DOESN'T cause thatch. Grass clippings can also be used to keep weeds at bay, as do other mulches. Call your local public works department for their guidelines about yard waste.

Herb Broughton of Franklin lost a big box elder tree and had much of it ground into chips. He is lucky to have some wooded property, so he used the chips to form an outdoor area at the edge of the lawn near the woods. He made an arbor of the large logs to form a perimeter for the area and used some of the logs as seats, making a nice place for entertaining. Nothing was removed from the property, thus saving a lot of refuse from going to a landfill.

"It would have been a couple of tons of refuse!" Broughton said.

Composting and using the leaves from our trees, and other garden waste, cutting the lawn to not less than 2-1/4 to three inches will go a long way to help this old Earth recover from the abuse it has sustained throughout the years from a "throwaway" mentality. This is a challenge that we all can be a part of, and our grandchildren and their grandchildren will thank us for it.

TIMELY GARDEN TIPS

The Avant Gardener reports:

■ Cedar shavings and chips make an effective insect-repelling mulch — some gardeners say they can keep plants such as tomatoes totally free of insect damage. An Oregon gardener reported they also repelled slugs from her greenhouse when the walks were mulched with cedar chips.

■ From the same publication: Rhubarb leaves, which contain oxalic acid, are an excellent weedkiller. One gardener reports the leaves kill dandelions, chickweed, etc. when laid on the weedy area.

■ Bush bean, carrots, cucumbers and summer squash can be planted now.

■ Chrysanthemums and asters can be set in the garden this month.

■ MOLE-MED has been tested at Michigan State University and works to repel moles. We sprayed it around the perimeter of the garden and seem to have thwarted our resident groundhog.

■ To receive a free brochure on the following subjects: herbs, vegetables, fragrance gardening, pest-free gardening, cut flowers or pruning guide, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: Ames Lawn and Garden Tools, P.O. Box 1774, Parkersburg WV 26102. Indicate the title of the brochure you want.

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Troy garden walk set

BY MARTY FIGLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

The Troy Garden Club, a branch of the Woman's National Farm and Garden Association, will have its 21st annual garden walk, "A Sprinkle of Flowers," 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 6-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, July 12, rain or shine.

Tickets are \$6 for the walk only, \$12 for the walk and a box lunch. Lunch will be served between 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. at the Troy Community Center. The club is famous for its delicious lunches ("We have the best box lunches in town — made by members"). A favor is included.

For information, call Mary at (810) 689-3135 or Katherine at (810) 740-8566. Tickets for the walk only can be bought on the day of the event at 2542 Weardon in Troy.

Donations benefit the Troy Outdoor Education Center, Detroit Zoo Gardens, Troy Historical Museum, Troy Public Library, 4-H Children's Garden at Michigan State University and Unity Park Vegetable Garden, and master gardener scholarships. At the Outdoor Education Center, they are donating to both the Landscaping for Wildlife project and for educational equipment for the many classes given there.

Many different gardens are on the tour: one at a condominium, another large landscape that includes a pond, a vegetable grower's garden and more. I recently visited a rather new garden, just 3 years old, where visitors will find a large diversity of plants carefully

tended by Les and Lynne Nurey of Troy.

This couple is from England, and the variety and color in the garden speaks of England. Before landscaping was begun, the yard was literally without grass or flowers, just a lot of trees. The back area is very moist; when they dig it's almost like a stream, Lynne said.

They removed 10 large overgrown trees and still have 10 growing on this city lot. The trees have been selected for their beauty and color — Japanese Maples, Blue Spruce, Crab Apple, Dogwood, etc. A tall fence surrounds the back of the property and is fronted by 31 Arborvitae, which really like the moist soil.

Lynne does most of the planning, planting and seed starting, while Les does the heavy work. Their son, Matt, 18, was also a muscle man when he helped plant the Arborvitae and remove the three truckloads of tree roots when those trees were taken down.

Several areas of the garden have been tastefully designed.

"I had no plan in mind," Lynne said. Son Mark, 10, enjoys the vegetable area of the garden, and they have planted beans and sunflowers to make a "house," which they believe will be ready in time for the garden walk.

The yard has both sun and shade, and plants have been sited to grow well in their chosen spaces. Angelica — Les calls it the pea shooter plant because as a young boy he would blow peas through the hollow stem — grows quite tall.