Hort Happenings

November 2014

The leaves are turning and falling in the Ozarks and this means one thing for gardeners – time to think about next year! But to maximize what we do, we need to do some fall chores so that spring will be even better than last year.

**Soil Test**

For those of you that have been following me for a few years, you know that I tend to harp on this subject. In reality this is the most important step in analyzing your plant health. In less than one hours work you can take steps in eliminating variables that could really cost you next year. First the test will help us keep tabs on soil pH which is the single most important measurement we take in the soil. Depending on the type of plants you are trying to grow, there are some rules of thumb to go by – Such as legumes needing a pH of at least 6.2. General veggies and shrubs can tolerate down to 5.7 to 5.8 pH and still do ok. On the other hand, blueberries need acidic conditions, about 5.2 pH or lower.

The reason fall is a good time to soil test is due to the fact that it could take 3 to 6 months to adjust you soils pH using lime to make it more alkaline or elemental sulfur to make the soil more acidic. Potassium (K) or potash requirements are met by adding potash or K2O. We you make applications it takes several months for this macro element to become available also.

So take those random samples and bring us a pint of soil, we generally have the results back in 2-3 weeks.

**Compost**

Lots of folks start thinking compost this time of year. This is an excellent product for you garden but many times people get so hung up on trying to get it just right that they never really get the end result. Some folks also just assume a big pile of leaves will make compost if you just pile them up. Somewhere in the middle of the high tech and no tech is where we need to be. You can get good results as long as you have a few mandatory ingredients, these are –
1) Carbon source – leaves, plant material, hay and corn stalks table scraps (No meat of animal fats)
2) Nitrogen source – animal manures, traditional chemical fertilizers and table scraps (No meat of animal fats)
3) Water
4) Soil (Humus)

When we hear about the carbon to nitrogen ratios (C-N) and the various contents of composting materials such as oak leaves which has a C-N ratio of 80-1 and is a carbon source down to aged chicken manure which has a C-N ratio of approx. 7-1 and is a nitrogen source we tend to become overwhelmed with facts and figures.

To enjoy making and using compost it should be fun and easy or we will never do it!

Graphic courtesy of University of Missouri Extension Service

Just consider anything with a Carbon to Nitrogen ratio of 30-1 to be a nitrogen source and anything with a C-N ratio above 30-1 as a carbon source and you will be fine. Below are a few examples of material in our area –

**30-1 and under**
1) Green (fresh) plant material – 17-1
2) Aged Chicken manure – 7-1
3) Veggie scraps – 25-1
4) Rotted manure (Horse) – 20-1
5) General Garden Waste – 30-1
6) Soil(Humus) – 10-1

**Above 30-1**
1) Hay (cured) – 90-1
2) Leaves – 60/80-1
3) Wood Chips/twigs – 700-1
4) Pine Needles – 80-1
5) Corn Stalks – 60-1
6) Shredded Newspaper – 175-1

The idea is to use approximately 1 amount from column #1 and 2 amounts from column #2. You are striving for a 2 to 1 mixture. Try to shred leaves and hay to reduce the amount of air in the equal parts (fluffiness).

Build your pile using a sandwich method of material from columns 1 and 2. After I get through with a layer I will throw in some shovels of soil that helps charge the pile with beneficial bacteria and fungi.

Make your pile wet and let it start to heat up and cook. If you want to speed up the composting process you can turn it every 3-4 weeks or you can just let it set, it will eventually get to desired product. The finished compost can be used as side dressing your plants next spring, they love it!
Pruning

It’s not yet time to prune fruit trees, small fruit plants or summer flower plants like roses. You do not want to encourage any new, tender growth this late in the year. Wait until December or later so the plants have become dormant. I prefer to prune most of my plants in late February as this helps to delay flowering just a little later, but this can cause some winter damage if we have any ice storms. You will have more limbs etc. that can break off during the heavy load of ice and snow.

Using Lime-Sulfur

There is a product out there that is organic and works real well as a dormant spray called Lime-Sulfur. If you have had problems this year with fungal problems on leaves in your fruit trees, small fruit plants, blackberries and grapes you should consider spraying with Lime-Sulfur. This product, used in the fall and again this spring at bud swell, will really help in our fight against anthracnose and leaf spots. If you are considering this I suggest you purchase it now as there is usually only a limited supply to be found in Boone County.

Lawns

I know that many of us aren’t really thinking about lawn weed control this fall, but now is actually a great time. All those unsightly pink weeds we see in the spring can start to be controlled right now. You should be making your fall application of a pre-emerge weed control right now.

Usually the granules are the best way to apply for homeowners while commercial applicators will use spraying techniques. An important item to remember about using pre-emergent is they need to be activated by rainfall or sprinkling your lawn within 10 days of application.

Pre-emerges actually do not inhibit germination of weed seeds, but actually form a barrier of herbicide under the soil level so that as seedlings attempt to grow up the pass through the herbicide and die.

Annual Grass Weed Seed in the Soil.

So if you are after early season weeds in your lawn apply now and again in late February. Remember to always follow the label when using any type of pesticide. The label is the law.

Sincerely,

Mike McClintock
County Extension Agent - Agriculture