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Landscape Advisory Bulletin: Landscape Care

New Landscape Irrigation and Fertilization:

Newly sodded and hydroseeded lawns require frequent irrigation applications in order to keep the soil moist. The soil must be kept moist or seed germination in hydroseeded lawns and turf rooting in newly sodded lawns will not take place. The irrigation controller should be programmed to make two, or sometimes three, water applications of a shorter than usual duration each day. Just enough water is applied to keep the soil moist. This regimen is usually required for 7 to 10 days.

Planting beds in a new landscape also require extra water. Here again the soil is to be kept moist (but not muddy) until new growth becomes evident. A well-mulched bed usually requires one irrigation application each day.

Trees and palms in a new landscape require careful watering for an extended period of time. Because trees and palms have deeper root systems than shrubs and groundcovers, sprinklers or drip installations do not provide adequate water for establishment. Sprinkler and drip irrigation provides water for shallow root systems. Providing irrigation bubblers is a good way to insure deeper watering.

In the absence of bubblers, it is important to provide enough water for newly planted trees and palms to moisten the entire root system at least once a week. This can be done by filling the watering basin provided or by laying a hose end at the base of the plant and allowing water to seep slowly into the root zone.

During warmer weather trees and palms should be deeply watered each week for the first year or two. This enables the plants to develop larger, healthier root systems and insures their survival.

Newly established planting beds and trees should be fertilized three months after installation, but not after October 1. Broadcast a complete fertilizer with a 3-1-1 ratio in planting beds and over as well as beyond the root systems of new trees. Then water the fertilizer into the soil. Tree spikes are not as effective as broadcast fertilization.

One month after establishment fertilize palms with a good palm fertilizer by broadcasting the granular material over and well beyond the root zone. Water the fertilizer into the soil. Palms require nutrients not provided in general-use fertilizers. Manganese, magnesium, and a generous amount of potassium are required for good palm health. These elements are generally found only in specially blended palm fertilizers. Another fertilization should be provided three months after the first application.

Fertilize new turf a month after establishment, but not after October 1. Use any good turfgrass fertilizer, but avoid using a slow release product after September 1. Fungi thrive on nitrogen in colder weather and can cause serious disease problems.

On-going Landscape Care:

Planting beds and trees should be fertilized twice a year, around March 1 and October 1, using a complete fertilizer with a 3-1-1 ratio. Avoid using a slow-release product after October 1. Fertilization precipitates new growth and if this growth has not hardened off by mid-winter, freezing temperatures may burn it off. Palms should receive three applications of palm fertilizer: around February 1, May 15, and September 1.

Saint Augustine 'Floritam' turf should be fertilized twice a year around February 1 and September 1. Bermudagrass turf generally requires three fertilizer applications, around February 1, May 15, and September 1. Multiple applications of fertilizer are required because the operation of irrigation systems leaches nutrients from the soil.

Weed control is always a special challenge. In planting beds grassy weeds can be easily controlled by using Fusilade II. This is an over-the-top product, one that can be sprayed over ornamentals without damaging them. Use of a spreader-sticker is required with this chemical. Sledgehammer is an excellent product for the control of nutsedge in shrub beds. This is another over-the-top product, one which also requires a spreader-sticker. Nutsedge (the world's worst weed) should never be pulled. If you pull one, you will get ten or twelve more in its place! Broadleaf weeds in beds can only be controlled by Roundup. Be careful with this product: it is non-selective, that is it kills everything on contact.

In Bermudagrass broadleaf weeds can be controlled using Southern Trimec. MSMA will provide effective control of grassy weeds. In St. Augustine 'Floritam' turf Atrazine will provide control of broadleaf weeds. Avoid applying this product over tree roots. Some trees are adversely affected by this chemical. Currently there is no effective control for grassy weeds in this turfgrass. Over watering and excessive nitrogen in soils during winter can result in disease, especially in Saint Augustinegrass. Here in the Rio Grande Valley brown spot is a serious problem, especially in winter. Diseased areas can be treated with a soil fungicide to control the problem. Terraclor is a product found in many garden centers. There are many other good products available, but all are costly. Proper irrigation and fertilization techniques can prevent many disease problems.

Trees have a language of their own. They will tell you if they are not getting enough water. Die-back on upper branches is a sure indication of water deficit. To avoid this problem it helps to deeply water younger trees weekly in the warmer months.

Fire ants are everywhere in the Rio Grande Valley. The mounds and adjacent areas should be treated as soon as the ants appear. Orthene and Amdro are two common control products used. It is important to alternate chemical use so that pests will not develop an immunity to one product. Some of the baits become inactive after a rain or irrigation application. Good timing is therefore essential for longer lasting effectiveness.

When an arctic cold front approaches, running the irrigation system to provide ample soil moisture helps prevent freeze damage on some plants.

This information was compiled for Top Cut Lawn Care, Inc.

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