

August 2009 Horticulture News

By Donna Beliech, Area Horticulturist, MSU-Extension Service

Time to divide Iris plants

Crowded iris plants should be divided now. I know it seems odd to separate and move clumps of plants during the hot time of the year but bearded iris is the exception. Cut the leaf blades into a small fan shape and reset the divided clumps in a sunny, well-drained location. Plant the rhizomes **no deeper** than 1 inch. Transplanting now makes sure that the roots are established before winter.

What you need to know about lawns in August

The best way to tell if your lawn needs watering is to walk across it, wait 10 minutes and see if you can still see your trail. If the grass blades are still lying down, then the yard is under moisture stress. If no rain is in the immediate forecast, pull out the hose and sprinklers. Moving the sprinkler every 45 minutes should give the area its recommended inch of water from most home faucets. Control weeds by spot spraying with an herbicide or hand pulling. Mow on a regular basis and keep the mower blades sharp.

Be on the lookout for fall armyworms. As the end of summer approaches, the night loving adult moth starts laying up to 1000 eggs each in egg clusters of about 150. In a few days the eggs hatch and the worms start to feed. They will eat every bit of green leaf tissue to the ground in a very short period of time. They are very easy to control with an insecticide application. The worm starts out about 1/16 of an inch long and gray-green in color. Older ones range from light tan to olive green to nearly black with stripes along their sides. The most distinctive feature is an inverted Y-shaped mark on the front of its head.

Most of our turf diseases occur in the springtime but a few like the hot summer. Gray Leaf Spot commonly occurs in St. Augustine grass. The infected turf will have irregular gray, dirty yellow or ash colored spots with brownish-purple, water soaked leaf blades. You'll notice it first in shaded areas that remain damp then the lawn will begin to thin out. To control it, stop using high nitrogen fertilizer, water during the day only and spray with a fungicide every 10 days. Another common summertime disease is Dollar Spot in Bermuda grass. It begins as small, (2 - 3 inch) circular dead spots in the lawn. Normally, this disease is seen in turf that is neglected, suffering from a lack of moisture and fertilizer. Once again, spray with a fungicide but also a good fertilization and watering program will help stop the disease.

Start fall vegetables NOW

Eggplant, okra, Southern peas and watermelon are thriving in the high temperatures and bright sunlight. Tomatoes, peppers and beans are just surviving but it's too hot for them to produce much fruit.

Time to start those fall vegetables. Cabbage, beets, broccoli, cauliflower and kohlrabi seed should be sown in the garden toward the end of August. Collards and kale are more tolerant of high temperatures but the heat tends to make the leaves taste bitter. If you like spinach, try planting it this fall instead of in the spring. The biggest problem is getting the seed to come up. It should be planted at about a half inch and never allowed to dry out for an entire week. This does not mean keep the seed wet. The best germination happens at soil temperatures about 70 degrees.

The end of August is sweet potato digging time. Carefully dig up the roots of a vine or two to see if the tuber size suits you. Try not to scrape the skin. Do not buy fresh sweet potatoes at this time. A cured and stored sweet potato is much sweeter than a freshly dug one.