



Prime's Clippings

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Volume 2011, Issue 2

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A Mild Mid-Winter Report Card

Although we have had several hard freezes, this has been a fairly warm and dry winter so far. We finally had a couple of rains in January and our northern counties had a pretty good snow, but we



could really use some more moisture. Pansies like dry winters but they still need some moisture to perform. They were struggling in December but have perked up some with the rains or if they had some additional help from our sprinkler systems. Rye lawns have needed water too but hopefully February will

bring some more rains. Nothing greens up or rejuvenates a plant better than a good natural rain. And we really could use some more cold weather to keep trees from budding too early. It might be nice to wear shorts in February, but it would really be better if we have a nice slow month-long transition to a March Spring.



Reminder for Late Winter Chores

Every year we like to remind you of the important jobs that should be done as winter winds down. This may be redundant to some of you avid gardeners, but take a glance at the following and make sure you are ready for Spring. We guarantee February will fly by before you know it!

Hard Pruning: There is still plenty of time to do some serious pruning before bud break. If you have old shrubs that have out grown their area, now is the time to make severe pruning cuts to reduce their size. Although they will look bad initially, most plants will recover and flush heavily in just a few weeks, looking like a newly planted shrub. Occasionally a weak plant may not recover from a drastic reshaping, but if it doesn't look good in its present configuration it is time to make a change anyway.

Transplanting: Most transplanting should be completed in February. With warm

weather everything will start flushing, so if you have shrubs, trees, or perennials that need to be relocated don't wait any longer!

Perennials, fountain grasses: Dormant foliage needs to be pruned back now on any perennials that you haven't already cut. *Salvia greggi* should be cut back now for a less woody plant with lots of blooms in March. Ornamental grasses such as pampass and miscanthus can be cut back at any time now. Just as with *liriope*, don't wait too late. New foliage will be sprouting soon. Most species of *lantana* return, although some will freeze out occasionally. *Lantana* should be cut back now also.

Trees: Our trees will soon start filling with sap and branches will start to droop. If you had any branches that were nearly too low last summer, rest assured that they will be way too low by April or May! This is an excellent time

to prune lower limbs to provide clearance over roofs, walks, and driveways, or to improve the view of your house and gardens. And if you have lawn under trees, your grass will always appreciate the little bit of extra light that you give it. Pruning before the leaves flush allows you to really see branch structure and make good pruning choices.

Groundcovers: Our two most popular groundcovers are Asian jasmine and the many forms of *liriope*. Both these plants respond well to being cut back before spring. Timing can be critical with *liriope*. It should be cut back within the next 3-4 weeks. Both *liriope* and jasmine can be trimmed with string trimmers (weed eaters) or with mowers set on the highest possible setting. Mondo grass usually should not be trimmed unless it developed a lot of brown tips from sun or being too dry. It takes months to recover from a trim.

Our goal is to fulfill the needs of the customer by providing timely, quality services and products.

Thanks for your business!

February Chores:

- Mow rye regularly
- Fertilize rye grass
- Apply pre-emergent & broadleaf herbicides
- Prune low limbs on trees
- Trim groundcovers
- Mulch beds
- Prune dormant perennials & fountain grasses
- Finalize plans now for new beds
- Plant and transplant trees and shrubs
- Install that new sprinkler system!

Knockout Roses — to trim or not to trim?

Knockout roses have become a mainstay of our local landscape both in commercial and residential settings. We are asked every year if we need to trim Knockouts and the answer is fairly simple.

Knockouts are popular for many reasons — they are consistent bloomers throughout the season, they have attractive dark foliage that holds late into the winter, but their biggest attribute may be their toughness. They are drought and disease resistant and perform with little care.

Rose enthusiasts may enjoy or accept the necessary chores required to maintain healthy hybrid teas and other finicky roses, but many of us just want a carefree plant with pretty flowers. Depending on the variety, many traditional roses call for an annual pruning, removing several of the canes and reducing overall height and size of the bush with some pretty



specific guidelines.

Now, do we need to follow this practice with the Knockout?

Although Knockouts can be enhanced by traditional rose pruning techniques, they really only need a serious pruning about once every three years, and can potentially go much longer. Of course, if your Knockouts are outgrowing their space, you can always cut them back just to reduce their size and this would typically be done in late winter. A vigorous bush will grow about a foot per year up to about five foot tall and wide, so cut at least a foot below where you want them to end up. And remember, the Rainbow Knockout is the smallest of the series, usually topping out around three feet.

Another nice feature is that they really don't require dead heading to encourage more blooms, but occasional shaping is perfectly acceptable throughout the season.

Take All Root Rot Disease in St. Augustine

A lot of St Augustine lawns were very patchy and slow to come out last spring after the wet winter and prolonged period of snow coverage that occurred Feb. 11. The wet conditions exacerbated a problem becoming common in north Texas lawns, Take All Root Rot.

In a 1999 survey of St. Augustine grass lawns in north Dallas, researchers at TAMU observed yellow patch symptoms of the disease on 61% of 70 lawns during the month of September. Symptoms of take-all root rot disease (TARR) typically appear on St Augustine grass as diseased patches of turf during late spring and throughout the summer months. Visual symptoms of the disease on lawns are initially small yellow patches of turf with leaf blades that appear chlorotic while the healthy leaves remain a typical green color. Yellow symptoms of the disease can persist on lawns throughout summer. In the final stages of decline, diseased stolons gradually succumb to hot summer temperatures or cold winter weather and

produce large patches of dead grass that do not recover from injury.

Although there are a few fungicides registered for use on TARR, the TAMU research found environmental conditions and vigor of the turf may pose some limitations on the effectiveness of fungicide treatments. They also tested topdressing the lawn with organic matter. "The use of organic topdressing to control turf grass disease is a relatively new approach to controlling turf grass diseases. Because of the complexity of microbial antagonism, fertility values of topdressing materials, different types of diseases and susceptibility of pathogens to pH, most of this type of research is directed by trial and error experimentation. We do have good evidence that the acid peat moss topdressings result in control of TARR on St. Augustine grass on Dallas area home lawns. In comparison studies, peat moss topdressing reduced symptoms of TARR for longer periods than cow manure compost and is thus considered the more effective disease control product."

We applied peat to some of lawns last year that were struggling and had good

results. Application rates have been recommended all the way from 1 bale per 1000 sq ft which would yield a layer about 3/8" deep all the way to a 1 inch deep layer. Unlike most politicians, we are recommending a middle of the road approach with about a 1/2 inch layer.

Granted, we have had a pretty dry winter so far, but if you have had patchy St. Augustine in prior years or have noted the yellow streaks in your lawn you should consider topdressing this winter or early spring. Noted local garden guru Neil Sperry did his yard a few years ago and was highly impressed with the results.

Our price for topdressing with peat is \$47.00 per 1000 sq ft on typical residential lots, and \$42.00 per thousand sq ft on lawns over 5000 sq ft in size.

A typical residential will run \$150—\$200.

DON'T FORGET!

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