

Yard Tips 4

August 2, 2015

Fertilizing

The temptation is to say, “See Yard Tips 3,” and say nothing else. That’s because everything in the last Yard Tips column is also true of August. Nevertheless, we need a word about fertilizing. If your last fertilizer application was in the spring, it’s definitely time to fertilize again. Also, when fertilizing in August, we will be dealing with what is traditionally the hottest and driest month of the year. August’s high temperatures will accelerate burning your freshly fertilized grass unless you thoroughly water the fertilizer in immediately after you put it down. You should run your sprinkler system no less than twice, set at 30 minutes per circuit.

Low Pressure in Sprinkler Systems

Does your sprinkler system seem to have puny pressure? Some sprinkler systems in Raintree are rather obviously underperforming. The covenants require sprinkler systems in all front yards. See Article X. Section 13. Most Raintree sprinkler systems were installed by the developer who built many of the homes in Raintree. However, the covenants do not require a minimum size submersible pump to assure adequate pressure to maximize the performance of sprinkler systems.

If you have poor pressure in your sprinkler system, the problem more than likely is an underpowered pump. It may be that you have only a 1 horse power (“hp”) pump or, God forbid, something less. Step it up to a 1 ½ hp power pump, and that might fix the problem; however, it is strongly recommended that you discuss the issue of how big a pump to buy with someone who has expertise on the subject, such as Mike Buxton of City Irrigation. 818-9850. Mike knows sprinkler systems inside and out, and if you’re looking for someone to upgrade or repair your sprinkler

system, you can’t go wrong with Mike. You should definitely talk to an expert about how big a pump you should get for your water system before installing a new pump. If you go to too large a pump with too much pressure, you can blow up your sprinkler system’s lines. You may already know how a puny pump will impact your system.

Another possibility for low water pressure may be that you have one or more leaks in your lines or your circuit valves, or possibly you have too many heads on your circuits. Investigate these possibilities before deciding to upgrade your pump.

Mowing Machines

Bermudagrass loves hot weather almost as much as it loves fertilizer and water, and the grass is really growing right now. Most of our Raintree folks mow with lawn tractors or zero radius mowers. Which is better? The answer depends on what your needs are. For those of you who are new to caring for an acre or so of bermudagrass, you probably know by now that whatever you buy, you don’t want to have to walk behind it, especially in August.

The advantage of a zero radius mower over a lawn tractor is that it will reduce your mowing time as much as 50%. The time savings are realized because of the maneuverability of zero radius mowers vs. garden tractors. A zero radius mower allows you to spend less time turning around to go the other way at the end of a cutting swath. The zero radius mower will spin 180 degrees when you’re ready to turn around, stopping at just the right spot to cut the next swath. Also the tighter turning radius enables you to mow closely around the trunk of a tree without ever having to back up, something you cannot do with garden tractors, unless you have (very expensive) four wheel steering.

One advantage of a lawn tractor over a zero radius mower is that most zero radius mowers do not come with trailer hitches that allow you to hook up attachments like utility trailers, fertilizer spreaders, roto-tillers, spray rigs for herbicides and insecticides, etc. In fact, some zero radius mowers may be underpowered or not geared to tow a heavy accessory in the first place, which is something you need to investigate before you install a hitch on your zero radius mower.

What make should you buy? There are several quality machine lines on the market. Which brand to buy depends on the availability of features that meet your needs and fit your pocket book. Garden tractors and zero radius mowers are not cheap, but like most consumer items, you will get what you pay for. Buy cheap, and you'll be replacing that cheap machine in a year or two with something more expensive after you have already spent enough in repairs to your old machine to pay for a new one. Also, your trade-in or resale price will be too low to help much in getting a new high quality machine. Another thing to remember is that every time you need to have your cheap machine repaired, when you get it out of the shop, you may be faced with a jungle to mow; and that's when you will really get it that your buying cheap was a bad idea. Cheap mowing machines bog down in tall grass; and, if you have a mulching kit, it won't mulch very much, so you will get to pick up grass clippings or just leave them lying on your grass which raises a whole host of other problems. Another factor is that cheap mowing machines mow poorly in the best of conditions. They have mowing decks that cannot be adjusted to be level enough for an even cut on level ground.

One important accessory you should consider for a mowing machine is a mulching kit. Raking up grass clippings, bagging them and putting them in your trash cans is a waste of your valuable time and a nasty job, to boot. Some mowers can be fitted with pull behind or attached baggers,

in which case you won't need a mulching kit. The advantage of a mulching kit over a bagger is that you don't have to worry about collecting and disposing of your grass clippings. Also, the grass clippings contain nitrogen, thanks to your fertilizing program, and it's better to return the nitrogen to your soil instead of consigning it to the local dump. The disadvantage of mulching is that you must slow down when mowing, or you will overpower your mulching kit and produce windrows or piles of clippings as you go. That ordinarily is not an issue with quality baggers. The disadvantage of a bagger is that it has to be emptied into disposable bags, unless it is equipped to put the clippings into plastic disposable bags inside the bagger.

Which is better, mulching or bagging? Ask around and see what answers you get from your neighbors; do a little internet research; talk to some dealers and then decide which is best for you. Probably the best stand of bermudagrass in Raintree belongs to Dalfred and Cherry Lynn Goodman, and they bag their grass clippings. Most of the time, Dalfred uses a walk behind mower, rather than a garden tractor or zero radius mower, and his front yard always look like a putting green. You may also have noticed that Dalfred does not have a weight problem. A quality, high powered, self propelled or walk behind mower produces more eye appeal than zero radius mowers or garden tractors ever can, but it's slower and a whole lot more work. On the other hand, it's great cardiovascular exercise.

There is another choice: A so-called "riding lawn mower," which is basically a cart on wheels with a steering wheel and a rotary mower blade on its underside. To begin with, riding mowers are not designed to care for acre or bigger lots. They are very slow and typically have a very small cutting radius compared to the mowing decks on zero radius mowers and garden tractors. They are also significantly underpowered, compared to zero radius and garden tractors; and that leads to bogging down while

mowing. Riding mowers also spend a lot of time in the repair shop. A typical riding mower will provide you with a lesson in mowing frustration that will lead you to getting a machine that is designed for something larger than a city lot.

Finally, there is another option on the market: a robotic, rechargeable battery powered mowing machine. I will confess complete ignorance about robotic mowers. If you're interested in such a machine, go to the John Deere website and check out the Tango. Another website that rates the "Top Ten" robotic mowers is www.robot-lawn-mowers-review/.topten-reviews.com/. There is a surprising variety of robotic mowers on the market. If these things actually live up to their hype, it might be something worth looking into.

Yard of the Month

Because I know that Tawna won't toot her own horn in the Newsletter, I'll do it for her:

Unsurprisingly, Gary and Tawna Mitchell received the July Yard of the Month award. While there are many great yards in Raintree, Gary and Tawna's yard is really spectacular and always has been. Gary, like the guy across the street, Chris Dumesnil, always has a new and impressive improvement project underway. Tawna is always right in there with Gary, shouldering her share of the work.

It's not just how great their grass looks, which it does, but it's also the fact that everywhere you look in their yard, there's something beautiful or unique, or both. The landscaping they have done is amazing. Congratulations, Gary and Tawna. Your yard is truly a gem in our neighborhood. The first thing visitors to Raintree see when coming through the gate is Gary and Tawna's wonderful yard, which makes a very favorable first impression that helps everyone's property values. So, we all are indebted to the Mitchells for that.

I might add that since early on, Tawna has been a member and officer on the Board of Directors and is currently our President, and she holds down a full time job plus overtime as an accountant in a CPA firm. Where does she find the time to do all she does?

Gary also has contributed a great deal to Raintree, and he serves as a member of the Architectural Review Committee, where his detailed knowledge of the covenants and construction is an invaluable asset. We're truly lucky to have an impressive and sharing couple like the Mitchells in Raintree.