

**Yard Tips 6**  
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**Fall Turf Fertilizing**

This one's short and easy: Unless your yard is newly established, don't. There are all kinds of products out there touted for "winterizing" your grass. Bermudagrass doesn't need to be "winterized." It remains dormant all winter and will not grow above ground. If you have followed sound turf management practices during the growing season, your bermudagrass turf will easily get through a typical Oklahoma winter and emerge in the spring ready to be fertilized after a long winter's nap.

In the spring, fertilizer is an absolute "must" if you want a nice yard. Don't fertilize in the spring and your yard will be a weed infested eyesore for the entire neighborhood. This Yard Tips column will give you timely guidance on what fertilizer to use, where you can buy it, how to spread it, and when to apply it. So, cool your jets this fall on the fertilizer, and wait until next April.

If you have a newly established yard, you might want to fertilize before winter with a low nitrogen, high phosphorous and high potassium fertilizer to stimulate root growth. But after the first successful growing season, you will never need to fertilize again in the fall.

**Fall Planting Time**

Early Fall is a good time to plant just about anything from spring blooming bulbs like tulips, jonquils and daffodils to ornamental trees and shrubs... but not bermudagrass seed, which will germinate just in time for the seedlings to die with the first frost, which historically comes around October 15<sup>th</sup>. However, cool season grasses like bluegrass, fescue and rye should be planted in early Fall. A handy tip for planting cool season grasses is to mix the seed with 10-20-10 fertilizer granules in the hopper of a broadcast spreader and "spread" away. The heavy phosphorous

and potassium will give the seedlings just the boost they need for an auspicious start. This is a particularly good way to overseed your bermudagrass with a cool season grass, provided you're aware that you will be mowing twelve months a year.

**Fall Pruning Time**

As temperatures start to fall, the deciduous trees will start becoming dormant, and they will begin to lose their leaves. Oaks, elms, maples, willows, red buds, etc. are deciduous. Some trees, maples for example, will "bleed" sap if you prune them before they go into dormancy. So, it's healthier for most deciduous trees to prune them during late fall and winter. That doesn't mean you can't prune at other times, just that it's better not to.

**Fall Leaves**

What to do with all those leaves that wind up on our yard as deciduous trees become dormant? There's always the old fashioned way: rake them up, sack them up and toss the bags in the trash. Then, there's the easy way. If your mower doesn't have a mulching kit, get one. You simply mow over the leaves, mowing deck engaged, and mulch the leaves, i.e. reduce them to tiny specks of organic material which is good for your soil and so much easier than raking and bagging (or, heaven forbid, burning the leaves).

You can purchase a lawn sweeper to pull behind your garden tractor or zero radius mower if you have a place to hook up the trailer hitch. These are pretty good at picking up the leaves, but getting the leaves out of the bin is a nasty and time consuming job. Not recommended.

Another thing you can do to dispose of fall leaves after raking is shred them in a garden shredder. You can use the shredded leaves in a compost pile, but keep in mind that if leaves

are the only thing in your compost pile, the compost will be very acidic, so you have to be careful not to use it on plants that don't like acidic soil. On the other hand, do use it on plants like azaleas which thrive on acidic soil.

### **Irrigation in the Fall**

Your bermudagrass turf, trees and ornamentals still need water in the fall, but you can greatly reduce the amount of irrigation from what you were doing this past summer. Without the searing heat from the sun we have in the summertime, the moisture in the soil from rain and irrigation will not evaporate and disappear overnight like was happening when daytime temperatures were hovering around the 100 degree mark for consecutive days a month ago. Obviously, the amount of irrigation you're going to have to do also depends on how much rain we get.

Your bermudagrass lawns will be turning dormant as the cooler temperatures move in, which means that your grass will turn from lovely emerald green to shades of tan and brown, but your grass is merely "dormant," not dead. By definition, "dormant" grass is very much alive, and like all living things, it needs water. So, don't fail to irrigate during prolonged dry spells. Failing to keep your dormant grass supplied with water can end up killing out large areas in your turf, i.e. "winterkill." Plan on watering at a very minimum twice a week, unless Mother Nature has blessed us with lots of nice rain.

Since we're talking about "water" here, remember from your high school chemistry class the molecular formula for water.... H<sup>2</sup>O? Two atoms of Hydrogen to one atom of oxygen, or "dihydrogen monoxide." A few years ago, there was a news report about someone at one of the prestigious West Coast universities circulating a petition calling on the EPA to ban dihydrogen monoxide as an additive to drinking water. They reportedly obtained several thousand signatures?

### **Fall Insects**

If we make it through October without an army worm infestation, we'll be fortunate. Some homeowners reported army worms in their grass last month, but the numbers of worms turned out short of being an infestation. A few years ago, we had a fall plague of army worms in Raintree that did a lot of damage. It's still important to keep a close eye out for the first signs of army worms. You will see them first crawling around on sidewalks, patios and driveways. They are 1 to 1 ½ inches long, greenish gray with a yellow head, and when you step on them, they ooze bright green goo. That's the chlorophyll they assimilate from devouring your grass plants.

There are quite a few insecticides on the shelves of lawn and garden retailers, formulated for army worms, as well as other creepy, crawly pests. Spray immediately after discovering army worms. If you're in doubt about whether worms in your yard are army worms, Google "army worms" and click on "Images." The photos you see there very accurately depict army worms in all of their radiant glory.

As the temperatures continue to decline during October, insects of all kinds will try to invade our homes to find warmer surroundings for their cold blooded bodies. This includes venomous spiders and scorpions, both of which are beneficial insects outdoors, but they pose a danger of painful bites and stings to humans, plus they might scare the \*\*\*\* out of you. You can call an exterminator to come out and spray your house, or you can purchase a product at one of the big box stores called "Home Defense." It's an insecticide that you spray along all of your baseboards and the bottoms of your doors. It is very effective and keeps on killing for months, and it's easy to apply. It comes in a plastic jug with a small vacuum actuated spray wand; so, all you have to do is pump it up and start spraying. The cost is minuscule, compared to what a professional exterminator will charge to do the same thing.

Another useful product for controlling spiders, scorpions and insects of all varieties is something often referred to as “fly paper.” It is a sheet of thin plastic material or cardboard with a really sticky surface that will trap anything that steps on it. Place them adjacent to baseboards in out of the way areas in your house and garage, and you will be amazed at the collection of dead bugs and other critters, even mice, you will find stuck on these little traps. Obviously, though, do not put these things down in areas frequented by pets or small children.