

INSIDE GRUNDY COUNTY
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The recent dry weather has caused many lawns to take on that mid summer look. Cool season grasses, like Kentucky bluegrass, respond to hot, dry weather by going dormant. During dry weather and as temperatures rise, it is best to mow Kentucky bluegrass at a minimum height of three inches. The extra height helps to shade the crowns of the plant and encourages a deeper root system which enables the plant to better withstand drought stress. In late summer, as temperatures begin to cool, you can again lower your mower deck and mow the bluegrass to a height of two and a half inches. It is best to clip no more than one third of the blade at any one cutting. This will prevent the extra clippings from bunching on the lawn and will reduce stress to the plants. Therefore, it is best to mow based on the growth of the grass not according to a set schedule.

A specimen of Fire Blight was brought into the office this past week. It was found on a pear tree and nearby apple trees. Fire Blight is caused by a bacterium that infects apple, crabapple and pear trees. The disease becomes active in the spring during warm, humid weather. Symptoms include infected flowers that first appear water soaked, shrivel and then turn brown or black. As the disease continues, leaves on the same branch will also turn brown or black and cling to the branch and bend into a shape similar to a shepherd's crook. That is the sample that was brought to the office. New growth is highly susceptible to the bacteria. The disease can be controlled with proper pruning, fertilizing and site selection. Pruning out the diseased branches, twigs and entire trees is best done during dormancy in late winter. However, in severe infestations of susceptible trees, summer pruning may be necessary to save the tree.

Questions about soldier beetles were fielded in the Extension office this past week. The beetles are elongate, soft bodied and about one half inch long. Their color varies from yellow to red with brown or black wings or trim. They resemble lightning bugs but do not have the light producing organs. Soldier beetles are attracted to and eat pollen, nectar and small insects such as caterpillars and aphids and may be seen swarming around linden trees or lilac bushes in the spring. They are considered a beneficial insect. In the fall, they may be found entering homes in search of protection. They are an accidental invader and are not harmful so there is no need to control them.

For more information about lawn care, Fire Blight or soldier beetles, contact the Grundy office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.