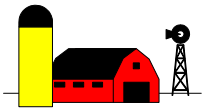

FARM AND HOME NEWS

CHARLIE BAIER, Iowa State University Howard County Extension Education Director

FOR THE WEEK OF April 4, 2005

Construction Damage to Trees

Spring is here and we start thinking about all those construction projects we want to do outside. Trees can be damaged, killed or injured during construction. Careful planning and coordination with your builder can reduce damage and save you trouble and expense of treating or removing injured trees. Injuries to aboveground parts are easy to see but damage to the root system or the soil is less obvious. It may take years for symptoms to show up. A tree damaged by construction may decline over a period of several years or it may suddenly die.

The best way to minimize damage to roots or soil during construction is to do nothing around, or on top of a trees root system. Construct a sturdy fence at the outer drip line of the tree to be saved and allow no activity within this area. The larger the area around the tree, the less damage. Tree saving practices during construction can be both time-consuming and expensive. You need to determine if the tree is worth saving. In some cases, removal and replacement after construction may be the best option.

Spring Lawn Care

March is too early to either fertilize or control weeds in your lawn. Generally, fertilizers are best applied sometime after April 1. Select fertilizers that contain slow release nitrogen sources. Weed control in the spring is a lawn care practice that should be considered carefully. If your lawn has a good dense stand of grass, weed control may not be needed. If you have a history of crabgrass, you may want to apply a preemergence herbicide just prior to crabgrass germination. This normally occurs when soil temperatures near 60 degrees F. Do not try to control dandelions in the early spring. Herbicide applications at this time will burn off the shoots but may not kill the root system.

Seeding a new lawn in the spring is possible if done properly. First, the site needs to be evaluated for the need of soil amendments. Conduct a soil test and incorporate the needed soil amendments. Seed will not germinate until soil temperatures are close to 65F. Therefore, delay seeding until later in April. Apply a starter fertilizer that contains a control for crabgrass. Protect the seedbed with straw mulch to help prevent erosion and maintain proper moisture to the germinating seed. Finally, keep the seedbed moist with frequent light watering.

Soybean rust and organic production

The Iowa State University (ISU) Organic Ag Program has been asked to respond to the discovery of Asian soybean rust in the United States and how it relates to organic growers. Iowa has approximately 60,000 acres of organic soybeans and all soybean growers are concerned about the prospect of rust appearing in Iowa in 2005. In May 2005, all available organically approved materials (copper, sulfur, hydrogen peroxide, and other naturally based materials) will be tested for efficacy against soybean rust. Tests will be conducted at the University of Florida where the disease was detected in 2004. The chances of finding a material as effective as the already-identified synthetic fungicides are not good, however. Organic farmers will need to identify the use of any fungicide in their organic plans for their certifying agency. Organic farmers, like conventional soybean farmers, will need to do a risk/benefit assessment and determine if economics favor spraying any materials if the disease is found in Iowa. Iowa State University will determine costs of materials for organic producers and help in developing best methods for dealing with this disease if it is found. Longer crop rotations and compost applications can assist with general disease management--the long-term effect of these strategies for soybean rust is not known at this time. This information is from ISU March 14, 2005 Integrated Crop Management article by Kathleen Delate.