Horticulture Frequently Asked Questions

July 20, 2012 webinar

Question: How can you tell when crowns are dead in a dormant lawn?
The most definitive way to determine if a lawn is dead or dormant is to take a four-inch plug of grass and soil, place it in a container away from direct sunlight, keep it thoroughly watered, and then observe re-growth. The plug of grass should sprout new shoots within two weeks. Alternatively, you can soak a four-square-foot area of the lawn every other day for a week and observe the amount of grass recovery. You also can visually inspect the crowns, buds, and rhizomes; brown to dark brown are less likely to recover, while fleshy white and dry but white are more likely to recover, but this is still a subjective evaluation.

Question: Is turf-type tall fescue easy for kids to run and play in or is it too clumpy?
A dense stand of turf-type tall fescue has about the same consistency and feel that a Kentucky bluegrass lawn would have. It may look slightly coarser, but it is certainly suitable for kids to play upon.

Question: What kind of grass is called “water grass”?
Water grass is a general term used by homeowners to indicate the grass-like vegetation that occurs when lawns have been irrigated and the summer progresses. When this term is used it usually turns out to be annual grasses such as crabgrass, foxtail, goose grass and sometimes yellow nut sedge. The name water grass does not represent any type of specific grass.

Question: Is surface watering better than root watering with a root feeding system?
I believe surface watering is superior to applying water with deep-root watering needles and other similar technologies. The key is to deliver the water slowly so that it infiltrates the soil instead of running off. And, roots of many of our woody landscape plants occupy the top 12 to 24 inches of the soil, therefore, you don’t want to apply the water below them. Finally, surface watering is simply more efficient at providing moisture evenly to the soil than the hit-and-miss technique inherent in applying water with a needle. — Jeff Isles

Question: Do drip irrigation tubes have heavy metal contaminants?
No, a drip irrigation system is made up of regular plastic and does not carry any heavy metal contamination.

Question: What are safe uses for graywater?
Any water, other than toilet wastes, draining from a household is graywater. Graywater could be efficiently reused in a horticultural setup. For vegetables it can be safely used for irrigation, although there are some basic things to keep in mind such as:

1. Do not use graywater in an overhead irrigation system. We do not want the foliage or the fruit of the crop to come in contact with the water.
2. Apply close to the base of the plant (in the root zone).
3. Do not use for crops in which the edible portion is in the ground (potato, carrots, radish, etc.).
Question: What are drought effects on Japanese beetle ravaged apple leaves?
As drought conditions become worse, apple and other fruit trees will go into dormancy. Heavy defoliation by Japanese beetles can act as a shock to break dormancy. If our drought is broken later this season, the buds could begin to grow and bloom.

Question: Will the apple trees come back next year?
More than likely the trees will come back next year, but their bloom may be affected by the severity of the Japanese beetle damage and drought conditions.