



**QUALITY FIRST**  
Lawn & Shrub Care



**QUALITY FIRST**  
Home Services

Owned & Operated by  
Jeff & Debra Melmer

# VOICE OF QUALITY

NEWSLETTER - WINTER 2014

## THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE BEAUTIFUL! ROSES

First, the good and beautiful; the colors - from red, yellow, white, pink and so on. Small blooms, big blooms, some that smell intoxicating, some that have no smell but are beautiful just the same. Climbers, shrub roses, cut roses, ground covers and English roses...so many to choose from; however, they are not without maintenance!

Summer months are tough on our roses; heat and rain can cause many problems. Insects and diseases follow due to our stressed out roses. Cooler temperatures are what they love, but you can have beautiful roses all year round with some care. We have a weekly care program here at Quality First, but it is an extra charge. We spray weekly, fertilize every other week and dead head spent blooms; also, cutting crisscrossed branches. In the Spring (March), we do a major cut-down and cut out any major dead canes. On the Quality First Lawn and Shrub care side, we spray all our roses once a month. Mainly for Chili Thrips, but if we have a spider mite problem, we will follow up.

Now for the bad. Some of the insects I've seen this Summer are mites, Chili Thrips, Aphids, Midges, Bud Worms, and Weevils. The major fungus of roses is Black Spot. Don't water in the evening, this pushes this disease; water in the early morning so the leaves will dry quickly. Also put drippers and/or bubblers in; they do not like over-head watering. Water 3 times a week in the Summer and 2 times a week in the Winter. So that was a little of our bad; but with a little care, we can eliminate or lessen the bad.

Enjoy your roses...I know I do!.....Deb



### IN OUR THOUGHTS

Sadly we recently lost a longtime customer; for over 20 years we have had a relationship with Elizabeth Leedy. She has been with us through three organizations beginning with Middleton and over 17 years with Quality First. Knowing Betsy was quite the pleasure and she loved her garden. We find after her passing of how many family members and friends we at Quality First have the pleasure of servicing. Thank you all for your trust and Betsy, enjoy your garden.....Jeff

### TID BIT

**Who am I?** Helpful Hints..

**1 FOOT** - Wingspan of world's largest (in South America)

**3 MPG** - How fast I can run

**6 LEGS**

**7 DAYS** - I can live headless

**30 DAYS** - I can survive without water

**40 MINUTES** - I can hold my breath

**75% TIME** - I spend resting

**90 DAYS** - I can live without food

**5000** - # of species like me

**289,000,000** - # of years we have been around

In case you need a little help - I will be waiting for you page 2

### SERVICE

It seems like yesterday we were putting out our last edition of the newsletter and here we are again working on another. A lot has happened over the last 3 months.

August was a continuation of what we considered a fairly wet Summer season, until the last 2 weeks; which became incredibly **Hot and Dry!** Temperatures were spiking at 96° - 98° with a heat index of 105° plus! Needless to say, it only took a couple of days and our turf started to show signs of stress. Even with all that rain it only takes about 2 - 3 days before heat stress sets in; and damage is done. Fortunately, it only lasted about 2 weeks before the rains came back. That leads to September and boy did the rains come back. At one point it had rained for 22 - 23 straight days. A little rain is good but 2" - 5" is just too much at one time; can we spread it out a little?

September is our turf fertilizer month, we would rather it not rain this much after the granular application, but we cannot control the rain! We will have to re-fertilize some areas that received excessive rains; this will probably already have been done by the time you are ready this newsletter.

October brought us some cooler temperatures; this is the beginning of what I consider the best time of year. From October through April we have some of the best weather around and as outdoor people, we really enjoy this time of year. This brings us to November and what I consider one of the better seasonal changes for all of us. The seasonal change that we are about to encounter benefits our turf and shrubs; cooler temperatures, short daylight hours and of course the holidays.

We will begin with irrigation: When daylight savings begins, it's time to set our irrigation back to 1x weekly. This can become very challenging as it may be too early (depending on temperatures) to go to 1x weekly irrigating. For many of us, it allows us to save money on water; many of us can easily go to 1x weekly where many of us need more. As a professional in the "Green Industry", it is my job to educate and inform you of changes or requirements on irrigation. In my professional opinion, it is very difficult to go from 2x

# MINUTE WITH

# Mike



Hello to all the friends and family of Quality First Lawn, Shrub & Home Services.

Since our last newsletter, we have had some dramatic changes to our office staff as I'm sure you've noticed by now several new voices on the phone and names on emails! Michele Criddle has taken a step up on her career ladder by taking a position with the Federal Government in Tampa. Congratulations Michele! We will miss her and we thank her for all her accomplishments while she was a full time employee here. I say full time because Michele has graciously accepted to stay on as Editor of our newsletter and our websites. She will also be continuing to spearhead the integration of our Accounting Package into our custom built routing software. Thank you again Michele!

Now to the new staff; First off, I'd like to thank Amy Briggs for taking some time off from her Grand mothering duties and helping us out during our personnel search. You're the greatest Amy! Thank you! After one misfire hire in the personnel search I think we've found the person who fits our needs and environment. I'd like to welcome Charlene Merchant to the Quality First family. If the last name sounds familiar, it is. She and Loretta are sisters. Hey – we're a family run business as you all know. Charlene brings a great skill set and her timing was great as she just resettled in the Orlando area. Charlene will take on the routing duties and Quality First Home Services administration. Loretta will take on the Accounting assistant position. These are some big changes for us, please bear with us as we all get settled in to our new responsibilities. As we do settle in, I'd like to also mention that Jeff and Deb's daughter, Crystal, is also helping out on a part time, as needed basis. Thank you, Crystal.

I feel like I'm forgetting someone, oh yes – Kelly, my wife! I'd like to give a great big shout out to her. Kelly has been the heart and soul of this office over the last 5 or so years and has been through a lot of changes, staff, operating systems, changing technologies, etc., but she has been my constant as we have built this office from the inside out. As anyone who has had the opportunity to speak with Kelly on the phone knows, she is absolutely the finest Customer Service representative I have ever had the opportunity to work with! Thank you for all you have done Kelly.

Moving on to other news; we are nearing completion on our Accounting Package which we hope to have up and running by the New Year. This will greatly reduce the time it now takes working with 2 different systems to keep track of all our great customers. We also hope to implement Customer User accounts on our website, [qualityfirstlawnandshrub.com](http://qualityfirstlawnandshrub.com) for those who like to see their invoices and make their payments on line. Once completed, we will move towards implementing on line bill pay and user accounts to our [qualityfirsthomeservices.com](http://qualityfirsthomeservices.com) website as well. It's all very busy and exciting as we continue to try and add additional convenience features for our customers.

Thank you all for your time. I hope you have an enjoyable and cooler Fall season.

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weekly to 1x weekly so abruptly; truth is, it is the only way to police irrigation restrictions. With that being said, I will give you my opinion on watering practices for the next couple of months. I believe that every property has different watering requirements and we should all work to understand our own and adjust our irrigation program to suit our property's needs; again, turf is what requires the most frequency. If at all possible, extra irrigation in those areas may be all we need to do. Our shrubs can easily make it on 1x weekly watering, with the exception of newly installed shrubs or landscapes.

So again, working with our systems we can enhance our landscapes for the time of year and save on watering expenses as well. Prior to having a watering restriction, we had a very successful watering regimen throughout the year. It fits most all landscapes while allowing our turf and shrubs what water they require, but also saving water and expense. Starting with this time of year we would recommend going to every 4th day to water for most of the month of November.

Then in December every 5th day, by January you should make it on 1x weekly watering through February. During March we go back to every 4th day and then April through October every 3rd day is best. Now keeping in mind, all this would work perfectly if temperatures and rainfall were all normal and all of our irrigation systems worked flawlessly. We may and can adapt this program to fit our own property; full sun properties always will require more, shaded properties less and low, wet areas, berms and slopes help to complicate everything.

I hope this helps all in making decisions on watering practices for this time of year. Check your irrigation system monthly to ensure all is functioning properly. By decreasing frequency, if we have deficiencies, it can become a long term effect that we begin to have problems during cooler temperatures; stress areas/issues take longer to be noticed. Rainfall is also a major factor for this season; please monitor a rain gauge for amount of rainfall in your area. As rainfall varies throughout, as many of us long time Florida residents know it can be raining on our property but not across the street! A good ½" of rainfall this time of year, you could probably skip a cycle, ¼" just consider it a supplement. With the reduced frequency of irrigation and little to no rainfall, areas that do not get decent irrigation coverage will dry up quickly; this is time for calibration. Monitor upcoming weather, this will also greatly enhance our abilities to decide on future watering needs.

Reminder: If you shut off your irrigation because of rain, please turn it back on before turf damage occurs (we need a better reminder system J)

Wishing you all the best!

Enjoy Family & Friends during this Holiday Season

I AM THE ANSWER FROM PAGE 1



# SECOND WITH

# Scott



## Plant Profile – The Boxwood

In this issue we will focus on the ornamental landscape plant the Boxwood, with varieties such as Korean and Japanese; known as “Man’s Oldest Garden Ornamental”. We see these throughout our landscapes in central Florida. Mainly used as a border plant or a small, well maintained hedge; known for its shiny, ovate foliage and colonial style appearance. It’s a moderately slow grower, liking full sun over partial shade. The best planting medium is acidic, clay type, loamy soil although they can grow in sandy types of soil, but when placed in sand remember they may need supplemental irrigation. When planting them, the spacing should roughly be 2 to 3 feet apart, they can grow up to 3 to 4 and 6 to 8 feet tall. However the majority of what we see in our landscapes are planted too close together and pruned so frequently that they never reach their complete growth potential.

I believe a lot of our pruning practices are way too frequent and this contributes to their growth and general plant health. Some other problems we encounter with Boxwoods are mostly root issues. One being root rot, contributed to excess water staying on the root zone or root system; which stunts the root hair development, which causes nutritional uptake to become very poor. Usually when this happens you will get localized die back within the plant; a section of the plant will just brown and die off. Soil nematodes also do a lot of root damage as well, especially in sandy soils. These microscopic, little round worms do so much damage: root development becomes so stressed and stunted. This slows the plant’s growth and health down dramatically and in some cases death; because they are extremely hard to manage.

To see some additional information: <http://polkhort.ifas.ufl.edu/documents/publications/Nematode%20Management%20for%20Perennial%20Landscape%20Plants.pdf> Until next time – Thank you

## SEASONAL ITEMS

Every year at this time we seem to see our St. Augustine grass not looking as good, many factors come into play here. The number one issue is mowing height! Do not lower your mower because the grass is tall...this is “scalping”. This practice puts a great amount of stress on a plant that is already stressed from the heat, humidity and rain! This can be detrimental to your turf’s quality and appearance. At this time of year, your grass is growing vertically and the mowing height should be at a minimum of 3 ½”, with 4” being better and 4 ½” being better yet. The leaf blade is an extremely important part of the plant; it’s what gives you your best color and is also crucial in food production. If we cut it off every week, we do not get to enjoy the color of our turf. As a rule, if your lawn is only green a day or two before it is cut, then looks bad or brownish after the cut, it’s time to raise your mowing height. Your turf will slow its growth around October and at that time we can bring our mowing height back down to a more normal height.

This issue really is only concerning our St. Augustine turf, our Zoysias are really peaking at this time and mowing height should be at 2”-2 ½” maximum. And as always, if you have any questions regarding this, please call so that we can answer any of your questions. – Jeff

**Turf/Grass -** This is typically the beginning of disease season for our grasses; Brown Patch Fungus is our most common. It is distinguished by an Orangish/Brownish areas in somewhat of a circular pattern. This is a moisture frequency related disease; with the program change of our granular fertilizer being done in September, we believe that we should have less disease issues this season. Nitrogen being the fuel for Brown Patch Fungus, fertilizer was applied at an earlier date thus reducing one of the elements for the development of Brown Patch Fungus.

Water through irrigation or rainfall is also a major contributor; so again, good management ensures better control of this disease.

**Weed control... an ongoing challenge -** With all the fertilizer applied in September and all the rain, weeds have popped up all over. Your technician will work diligently to correct this issue with every service. This season allows us to use a better weed control blend, giving us a better control measure. It may take an application or two, but we will regain control of our weed issues.

**Mowing -** Seasonal changes in mowing usually begin in November and your landscaper typically starts cutting your grass every other week; this is good as it reduces a lot of stress to your turf. With cooler temperatures and short daylight hours, our grass growth will slow considerably. Your grass will begin to lie down and instead of growing vertically; it will begin a slow horizontal growth. DO NOT allow your landscaper to cut your grass shorter to make it 2 weeks for the next cut! This is very stressful to our turf and it cuts off all our color. Recovery from this is very slow and in many cases allows for more weed development or even possible turf loss. Communicate with your landscaper on this issue. You may feel they should just know this, but many of them are unsure and maintain the notion of “we always do it this way this time of year”. As we all gain knowledge and understanding of our cultural practices, we all have a great impact on the overall appearance and health of our landscapes; communication is the key to success.

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EMAIL THE EDITOR ~ Do you have a question or comment you would like addressed in an upcoming newsletter?  
michele@qfls.co - Editor - Michele Criddle



Quality First Lawn & Shrub Care, Inc.  
PO Box 720475  
Orlando, FL 32872

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### **Tips With Tom ~ Invoices**

#### ***Why take the service invoice so seriously???***

Often thought of as just a leave behind of no value, a service invoice can be a wealth of valuable information. The service invoice is an important tool we use to communicate with our customers. It contains information on the products applied, the amount of product and the locations which it was applied; as well as documenting conditions conducive to a pest infestation, sanitation or structural deficiencies, visible pest activity and details of the service performed are also noted on the invoice.

The information contained on the service invoice also can be of great benefit to the service technician. When taking the time to review the service invoice of an account, the service technician can gain a greater awareness of the customer's goals and needs which results in ways to enhance and improve the existing pest control program. To the pest management professional, this information is invaluable; it's also important to remember that each completed service invoice is simply a snapshot in time. That is, the information collected during the service visit only provides a small portion of the pest management picture. It is only when we take the time to really look at a series of invoices can a more complete picture of our customer's account be visualized and a more successful control program be developed.

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**Shrub Care** - A variety of issues develop with our ornamentals throughout the Summer; most of them are bug related and relatively easy to resolve. The disease issues that develop can be difficult to diagnose, thus treatment is sometimes ineffective. The basic diseases such as Leaf Spot are easy to diagnose and treat, the reason they are present may be more difficult to discern. Heat stress, too wet (sitting in water), too dry, trimming stress and improper installation are all contributing factors.

Trimming...constant trimming weekly and bi-weekly add a great deal of stress to our plants; trimming soft tissue vs getting into the woody part of the plant. Trimming is "injury", thus the plant is stressed and always trying to heal. A lot of our shrubs handle this well; several really never get to their potential because of this. It is best to leave some fluff; it looks better and is healthier for your landscape, but if you prefer this well-manicured look, then continue on and we will battle these issues.

Last year we gave more attention to our Holly shrubs, a lot of you even our landscapers, reduced their trimming frequency and I must admit our Hollies over all have looked the best I have seen in years. This year our Boxwoods have really been beat up; a lot of dieback and overall just poor performance. The wetness of the Summer, the fact that they are affected by Nematodes and a lot of shearing has really had an effect on them! A little less trimming and some time to develop new growth will aide in their recovery; some may just need to be replaced.

September...very wet, really took its toll on a lot of shrubs, Hawthorns, Plumbagos, Ground Cover Jasmine, Duranta and Crinum Lilies are just few that at this time look poor. Our shrub fertilizer this month and some fungicide should improve them over the next several weeks.