

# VOICE OF QUALITY

NEWSLETTER - SUMMER - 2018 - 2nd Edition



Owned & Operated by  
Jeff & Debra Melmer

## THE DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

It is incredible to think it is already August. It has been an eventful year to say the least. So much goes on from season to season and each season offers an opportunity to succeed or fail in our landscape.

As May began we all could not wait for the rains to begin and boy did they! It sure had an impact on our landscape and seemingly overnight our landscape, especially turf, came alive. After the extended period of no measurable rainfall, the rain was welcome.

I believe in May we set a record for the most consecutive days of rain. As we all like to save money on our water bill this allowed us to shut down the irrigation systems. We received over 9 inches of rain over a 2 week period with many areas receiving more than that but some not as much. This alone allowed us to get out of a water deficit that had reached over 10 inches for the year to date.

As June rolled in it reminded us that summer was here. We recorded temperatures in the mid 90's and a heat index of 105 plus. This is brutal on our landscapes, especially our turf. As the rains continued in June we began to see the effects of excess rainfall in some areas while other areas had little to no rain and again it really takes its toll on our turf.

Heat stress will happen in a matter of a day or 2 and the effects can take weeks to recover. In severe situations it can take months for the grass to recover. A lot of us like to manually turn our irrigation clocks on and off. This is great when it is raining but as soon as the rain stops we many times forget to turn the clock back on and this is when we see our localized dry spots happen. We strongly advise you to consider adding or replacing your rain sensor during this time of year to aid in irrigation clock management. Rain sensors are not infallible but they sure help with reducing need to remember to turn the clock back on when the rain stops. The new style that is wireless are not that expensive and the design makes them much more accurate than the old hard wired sensors. They also last much longer. A functioning rain sensor can be your best tool! It determines how much rain you received at your property, not across town. If you receive  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 inch you are good for a couple of days and the sensor will shut the system down for you. If you get less or none at your property the sensor will allow the system to run. Rain from quick moving thunderstorm cloud burst typically results in runoff and does not penetrate much of the soil. This is why we often find dry soil even when we have been getting a lot of rain. Dry soil is extremely easy to diagnose. It is not fungus or bugs causing the damage, even if they are present they are only a secondary issue as a result of the dry soil. If the soil is dry, it is dry, and the roots of the plant will be damaged. Now determining why the soil is dry is not always easy but until it is determined, the only cure is to get extra water on the area.

At best managing your landscape can be challenging, especially when it comes to water. There is no magic formula to simplify all the moving parts. This is why a rain gauge can be such a useful tool. Communication and education are important factors in managing our landscape, from our service to your maintenance team, and irrigation guy, we all play key roles in the overall success in our landscape.

As you review this newsletter we have many articles about irrigation, mowing, shrub care and an article about sod web worms. Please take the time to review each article and if you have any questions please contact our office.

Our office staff does a wonderful job for us and they can answer many of your questions or concerns, but if they do not have the answer they will talk to us and communicate back to you the proper information.

Jeff Melmer



## IRRIGATION

There are many questions regarding irrigation. Irrigation frequency? What time is best to water? Should I water in the middle of the day? Won't that burn the grass? Does it evaporate?

We often hear; "we get tons of rain", "it could not be water with all the rain", "my irrigation guy said it is getting plenty of water it must be bugs or disease". These are all legitimate statements, but are they correct? In some cases yes, but how much water is a ton of rain? Your technicians, I, and our office staff communicate as much as we can about monitoring rain fall. A simple rain gauge is all you need so you know exactly how much rain you received at your property. ¼ inch to ½ inch is only good for one day in the summer . Irrigation Calibration is an effective tool in understanding why a certain area of our landscape, especially turf, struggle at times. Just by merely turning your irrigation on and watching it, does not mean you are getting good water and irrigation is not the issue. This is a common statement but until you calibrate you can only guess that it is adequate. Recently talking to an irrigation specialist that owned his own business for over 20 years and who has a few crews on the road, I mentioned the area he was trying to fix was not getting enough water. He went into all the gallons per minute and what type heads, and size of the lines, how everything was getting covered, and on and on. I said lets calibrate.



We put cups throughout that zone, including in the center of the bad spot and the good spots. We then ran the system for 15 minutes. The area in question was being watered by a head doing a 360 degree turn. It was putting out 75% less water than the rest, which at most had heads only doing 180 degree turns. He looked at me and said, "I guess you don't know, until you know!" To be fair he did also say he knew how to calibrate and had become complacent by relying on the mathematical equations. Something he would change going forward.

Please understand that we all receive varying amounts of rain on a daily basis. The rain gauge is a valuable tool in understanding water, water needs, and water requirements to sustain a healthy landscape and in many cases saving us money on our water bill.

You should never water established plant material more than 3 times weekly. If you have to water more than that to sustain your turf then you have a coverage or volume issue. Anyone that waters 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 days a week continuously is setting themselves up for failure, especially with turf. By the time you notice the ill effects of over watering it is too late and we are now in a recovery mode. The damage done to the plant and its root system may take up to 90 days to recover.

## RAIN SENSORS

Rain sensors sense moisture and will shut your clock down when functioning properly. Location, Location, Location, is the key to ensuring the sensor functions as intended. We receive directional rainfall frequently. If your sensor is near the clock, lower than an eve, under a tree, hanging upside down, or just old, it should be updated and properly placed. The newer wireless rain sensor sure makes it easy to properly place your rain sensor for optimum performance while not being an eye-sore on the side of the house.

## COMMUNICATION

In today's society and technology we all like to speak directly with our technician. Our technicians are well trained and extremely knowledgeable. We issue our technicians a company cell phone to communicate with you so that their personal phone does not get work calls. This is certainly effective in you getting a quicker response. We would however like to ask all of our customers to communicate through our office staff. This way we have a record of your communication and we can track it until resolved. This is our way of ensuring you get the service needed. It is very important to understand our technicians service several customers every day. 1 direct call from a customer may not seem like a big deal but when you add in everything they deal with daily, they can easily forget that they received a call or text. The result is you do not get the response you are after and no one but you knows there is a problem. To better serve you, we ask that you go through our office and we do appreciate the cooperation.

## MOWING

This is the time of year that our St. Augustine grass can be put under a great deal of stress. Mowing height is critical for St. Augustine. At this time of year your grass is growing vertically, it is standing straight up. Your mowing height should be adjusted to compensate for this. Most St. Augustine grass should be cut at a minimum of 3-½ inches during most of the year. However, this time of the year through October you should be mowing at 4 to 4-½ inches. This ensures optimal appearance, health and color are maintained. Cutting to short puts a great deal of stress on your turf. It can weaken the plant, bugs sense stress (So do yourself a favor- raise your mowing height, talk to your landscaper and get them to raise their mower.)

With the excessive heat that we have been going through, scalping or cutting the lawn to short likely will result in the loss of turf rapidly. At this time of the year getting the turf to recover from any type damage is difficult due to the growing season getting shorter.

Shaded St. Augustine benefits from a higher cut all year long so there will be more leaf blades to absorb light needed for photosynthesis, this will also aid in retaining turf density for this time of year.

Zoysia turf performs its best at 1 ½ inches tall. By this time of the year you are likely about that height. 2 to 2 ½ inches is the maximum height Zoysia should be mowed. Any taller begins to present color and appearance issues as the year wears on. Please discuss proper mowing with your landscaper so they continue at this level to insure your Zoysia can look its best for the remainder of the year. Keeping the cut low also reduces what has to be removed in the spring.

Zoysia also seems to be very sensitive to heat stress and can wilt very quickly. This does not require extra water, but does imply the importance of adequate irrigation coverage during our non-rainy periods. We do treat problem areas with nutritional supplements and the areas usually recover in a few days to a week or 2, depending on the severity of dehydration.



## MOSQUITO CONTROL

All the rain and standing water has made the mosquito population explode. I have to say they are about the worst I have seen as far back as I can remember.

We are able to get good control by using a machine that blows the products in a fine mist allowing them to reach the underside of leaf material. This protects a lot of the product from breaking down quickly. The mosquito we deal with is a very weak flyer and must rest about every 6 foot of flight. As they move through the property they rest where we have put products. In general this works really great. However, the weather this summer has been prime for mosquitos and sometimes not so good for us.

I wanted all of you that have our mosquito control program to know if you have an event coming up or just feel you need a retreatment we will be happy to do this at no extra charge beyond your regular program charges. Just give us notice so we have time to get out prior to your event and we will be there for you. Our goal is to make your gatherings a mosquito-less success and we will happily do what is needed to beat the challenges created by the weather conditions.



## HAVE BLACK FLIES?

This time of year Blow Flies and Black Flies can drive us nuts. Keeping a spray bottle of 50/50 bleach/water near the trash storage area can be a great help at reducing them. Just do a light spray to the sides and bottom, in and around, your trash cans after the trash man comes each week. Just be careful as mist drift can damage your clothes and plants.



## SOD WEB WORMS

This time of year we experience a pest called the Sod Web Worm. This insect has a complete life cycle. (It goes through the same developmental stages as a butterfly.) You may also notice this time of year we are seeing a lot of butterflies. This is important to understand because in our area all the insects in the moth and butterfly families are pupating this time of year and developing into the adults you see fluttering around your property. All of these insects are very sensitive to heat and sun, moths being the most susceptible. This forces them to gather in shady areas of your lawn during the day. After dusk they fly away and do moth things. With all of this said, only a small number of the dingy brown moths that you see in your lawn are actually sod web worm moths. It also is impossible to eliminate the moths. Sprays will only kill the ones that are there at the time of the spray. As soon as the spray dries, moths from other areas will move in because the environment is favorable. (cool, shady, and moist) Having moths in your shrubs and lawn does not mean there are caterpillars currently damaging the lawn. (no moth or butterfly is capable of causing damage to your lawn or shrubs)



One extremely important thing to understand is there is a chemical that greatly reduces the possibility of damage from the caterpillars. It truly is a preventative treatment for sod web and army worms. The product is systemic and absorbs into the grass' circulatory system. When the Sod Web Worm and Army Worm caterpillars hatch they are extremely small and must feed on the grass. While the level of pesticide is extremely low, the size of the caterpillar makes it extremely easy to kill. We treat every lawn with this product and have done so for 5 seasons now. It works and it last through the lawn damaging caterpillar season! To our knowledge no other company uses this product in our area because it is very expensive. We choose to use it so our customers do not get damage. Like many other extra or special things we do, our main objective is to take care of the customer. If you have ever replaced grass because it was mowed down and did not recover from Sod Web Worms you know exactly why this is so important. Nothing we do can stop a flying moth from getting where it wants to be. So you will see moths. But it is very unlikely that you will ever see damage from the caterpillars when we are servicing your property.



As you know this has been an extremely wet year. The rains just kept coming and the Turf grew very fast. The abnormal weather has allowed us to see how well our treatments have been working. In past years we would seldom have retreatments for Sod Web Worms. The product absorbed into the plants system and stayed at a control level for the whole season. We found that this year it has not worked as well. We believe the grass just grew so fast that the product moved through the plants system too quickly.

We are seeing activity in many properties. It is being addressed and after treatment the turf will recover. We constantly find ways to make our service as proactive as possible so you seldom have to experience issues like this. However we are often fighting against Mother Nature and you know how hard that can be.

## TIME TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL, THANK GOODNESS!

When you are out buying all those new school clothes a good tip to make sure they are pest free, is to wash and dry or at least run the clothes through the dryer on high heat for about 10 minutes. Bed bugs, bed bug eggs, clothes moths, and most all other pests that might hitch-hike on the new clothing can be destroyed with about 10 minutes at 125 degree heat greatly reducing the possibility of an infestation in your home.



## SHRUB CARE

There are always challenges when it comes to shrubs. They do tolerate a lot more stress than what our turf does. The rainy season can wreak havoc as too much water is not always a good thing. Some plants prefer wet soil, some prefer dry conditions. Matching the plants to the moisture conditions will lead to less maintenance and a healthier landscape.

We get a lot of questions on trimming shrubs. How much to cut, when is the right time and how to cut different plants? A lot is dependent on the shrub. This time of year with the issues of heat, major pruning can be very stressful and minor pruning can even cause problems for some plants. By this time of year any major pruning should be completed. We do not have that much growing season left for plants to fully recover. Good results from pruning are very dependent on the time of year. If you must do pruning this time of year, get it done as soon as possible and consult with us if in need of advice.

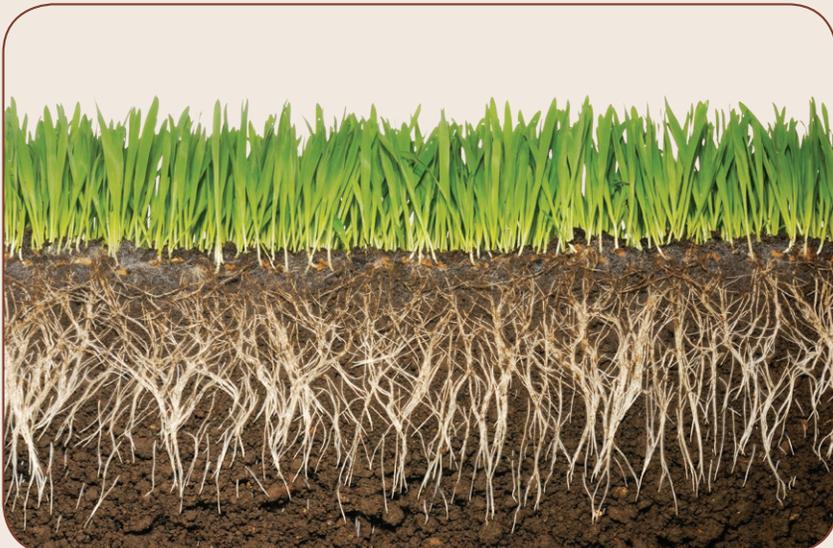
On the other hand many plants do need minor pruning, so that they are not so overgrown by late fall. Some plants that will perform better later this fall if trimmed this time of year in no particular order, Snow plant, Knock Out roses, Hawthorne, Trinetts, Crotons, Plumbago, Pinwheel Jasmine, Dwarf Azaleas, Poinsettia and Hydrangeas are just a few that can receive minor trimming. Even your Crepe Myrtle could use a little clean up to keep blooms going well into September. The following plants should not receive much if any pruning at this time of year; Formosa Azaleas, Viburnum, Ligustrum, and Jasmines.



## ST AUGUSTINE GRASS IN SUMMER HEAT

You likely noticed that your St Augustine lawn started to thin out a little as we went through summer when the rains finally came in May. This can be seen very easily in shaded areas. We wanted to share with you what is happening.

Plants can only take in light to produce sugars and starches through the leaf blade. If you follow the St Augustine leaf blade down you will find the crown or sheath that is at the base of the blades and connects to the runner. The runners and sheath do a very poor job of converting sunlight to energy. When the heat and humidity skyrockets St Augustine sheaths begin to grow more straight up while the rest of the year they grow closer to the soil. When the sheath is sticking straight up this alone makes the grass look thinner. If you mow and remove too much of the blade this slows the plants ability to produce energy to the point that it begins to thin out. This is why it is even more noticeable in the shade where lack of sunlight is already an issue. All of this is a natural process the plant goes through as it grows and nothing can be done to stop it. As the heat and humidity begin to drop the sheath will lay back down and the lawn will thicken back up.



The only thing that can be done to improve this situation is to make sure your mowing height is raised to 4 to 4 ½ inches so there is more blade left after mowing to produce energy. Also do all you can to not miss a mowing. This can be difficult with all the rains but things will be worse if the lawn grows too tall.



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## **PALMS ARE STILL SUFFERING FROM LAST WINTERS FREEZES!**

It seems so long ago but for landscape and especially palms the freezes we had last winter are still having a major impact on growth. We had gone so long without hard freezes that many plants that look very nice and added some changes in our landscape appearance, began to be used. The only problem being that those more tropical plants really did not belong in our region. They are more Subtropical / Tropical and do not handle cold weather. Last winter was so cold even many of the plants that are recommended for our region have struggled.



You are likely to see more yellowing on your palms as they work to produce new spears and seed pods. It takes a lot of energy for the plant to produce new growth. While supplements in the ground are stored in a palms system the bulk of the nutrients needed for new growth are taken from the oldest foliage on the plant. When you see the lower branches yellowing and turning brown this is all just a part of how the circulatory system functions in a palm.

Now the plants that really took a hard hit from the freezes as well as the ones that really do not belong in our region are going to take much longer to recover. The plant is also going to add more new growth than a normal year. We can expect to see 2 and even 3 new sets of branches this year. The cycle could even be constant for the whole year and for heavily damaged palms could go easily into next year.

As long as the new growth is coming in healthy and green, the palms should be fine. If you see twisting, curling, or discoloration in the new growth there may be another problem. You are always welcome to let us know if you have concerns and we will be happy to take a look. When trimming old growth it is always best to wait as long as you can stand it, allowing the branches to turn brown, so you do not remove these nutrients. It is strongly recommended to never "Hurricane Cut" your palms. This is defined as removing branches that are above a 180 degree plain from the bottom of the head. This is extremely stressful and likely will result in additional damage to the palms still stressed from the freezes.

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