

VOICE OF QUALITY

NEWSLETTER - SUMMER - 2017 - 2nd Edition



Owned & Operated by
Jeff & Debra Melmer

A WORD FROM JEFF

Last year at this time we had an article about the “Service Challenge”. As I look back at the article I feel that we must re-address the challenges to providing superior service, as many issues change throughout the year, yet many stay the same from season to season.

Summertime is our most challenging season! With the heat, humidity, and rainfall all in abundance this can drastically affect our landscape. Turf is typically affected the most by environmental changes. St Augustine turf being the most challenging, during this period. There are articles in this newsletter discussing St Augustine turf, so please review them as they might answer a lot of your questions. Should you have further questions, please do not hesitate to call our office so that we might further discuss your specific issue.

As most of you are aware we have been through a period of 7 months that we received very little to no rainfall. Fortunately the majority of that time came during the cooler part of the year so lack of rain was less damaging to your landscape. As temperatures began to climb and this period extended into April and May these drought conditions started to drastically affect our landscapes. In what we like to term as having a “long term effect”.

In some cases we came across large shrubs and trees under duress and even dying due to the dry conditions. This was also a period that was beneficial to the majority of our landscapes. How could that be you may ask? I will tell you it is because we had total control of the water! We have always known and try to communicate that we typically over water our landscape, especially our shrubs! Turf will always be in need of more frequency of water due to the root system it has and will always be more challenging concerning too much or too little water.

Every month we have company meetings to discuss with our technicians service issues and strategies. In our meetings we discussed what was about to change for the upcoming season. In what we called “Growing Conditions”. The effect of going from a water deficit of 10 to 12 inches in most areas, to daily rains and some rainfall amounts of 2 to 3 inches and more in a single event. This is when we start to see a lot of problems develop. In June Grey Leaf Spot flared up throughout our area and we had to become reactive to resolve this problem. In July most of it has been resolved but the ongoing heat and rain make conditions very favorable for disease to continue to be present. Our Zoysia lawns have seen the fewest of problems. This turf is very resilient, but also has its problems. Shallow rooting makes it very susceptible to dry spots. Molecrickets are a major issue for Zoysia and these insects are just getting started in their damage causing phase, and large patch or brown patch fungus is the major disease issue, but it is also very preventable. (Please watch for our October / November newsletter as we outline ways to prevent this disease from doing its seasonal damage.) The next portion of this article is an outline of our discussion with our technicians. I believe we work harder to educate our technicians than anyone in our industry as we strive to deliver the highest level of service in our area.

8 MONTHS OF DROUGHT TO EXCESSIVE RAINFALL & HOW IT AFFECTS GROWING CONDITIONS

Most plants will do well in moderate to ideal growing conditions.

How poor conditions will adversely affect plant development and performance.

Understanding conditions can change in as little as 1 to 2 foot in distance.

Determining the primary cause and addressing it opposed to the secondary issues found.

Factors that impact growing conditions; Plant selection, Installation, Irrigation, Sun / Shade factors, Soil pH, Nematodes, Mechanical factors such as trimming to frequently. I hope that this can give you an understanding of the challenges we face on a day to day basis and how weather conditions can adversely or positively affect our landscape.

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 . How quickly the moisture in the soil evaporates could be easily related to how quickly we dehydrate in this extreme heat. At least we can get a bottle of water, your turf just lays there suffering, unable to move to the shade or turn on the water.

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 overwatering 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.

In some cases a short watering in the afternoon is ok. Hydrating the plant under extreme heat can reduce the damage from extended stress and saves work on everyone's part. Ten to fifteen minutes of water hydrates the plant at its most stressful time. This is a short term solution and should not be practiced daily. Ongoing or continuing to water mid-day will lead to many disease issues in your landscape.

MOWING - ST AUGUSTINE

This is the time of year that our St. Augustine grass can be put under a great deal of stress. There are a lot of issues involved as you can see from my opening article. 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, a wonderful grass if you like shorter turf. Zoysia prefers a shorter cut and it looks best at 1½ – 2 inches.



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 4 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.



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 / timing. 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. A great source to gain knowledge of a particular plant is the University of Florida website. Go to IFAS.com and then use the search bar for what you are looking for.

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 when the rains finally came in June. 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 weather 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 thing will be worse if the lawn grows too tall.



OUR SERVICES

From time to time folks say I didn't know you guys do that.

Having a little extra room in this newsletter we thought we would just remind you of all the services we are capable of performing. If you every need anything we would be very happy to inspect, council, and provide what is needed to fill your needs.

Lawn Care

Broadleaf, Sedge, and Grassy Weeds
Dry Granular Turf Fertilizer

Weed Control Post and Pre Emergent
Nutritional Supplements as required for turf for maximum color

Shrub Care

Shrub Fertilizer - Custom Blend
Comprehensive Chili Thrip program
Insect and Disease Control

Nutritional Supplements as required for shrubs
Cycad Scale Control for Sago Palms

Home Services

Termite & Pest Control
Tick & Flea Control
Mosquito Control

Termite Inspections
Subterranean Termite Treatment & Guarantee
Fire Ant Service

Precision Water Works

Irrigation Systems:
Analysis
Repair

Maintenance
Calibration

Consultation Services

Re-landscaping Consulting

Services we provide at an extra charge

Nematode Treatment

Magnolia Injections, for controlling Tulip Tree Scale

Soil Amendments (PH issues)

Pre- Emergent Shrub Bed weed control

Comprehensive Flea Treatment

Palm Care- Fertilizing, disease & insect control

Turf Top Dressing & Aeration

Diagnostic Testing for Disease Control on most plant materials

Let Quality First Lawn and Shrub Care be the last company you have to call for your turf and shrub care. You will not regret your decision or spend another year feeling like your money was wasted only to start over.

Our motto is **"We Care"** and we really do!

"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives." - **William A. Foster**

CASE MAKING MOTHS AND PANTRY PESTS

Honestly we are not sure why but we have been seeing more homes with Clothes Moths and Pantry Pest infestations than usual. If you have signs of these pests in your home you may have damage occurring to Food, Clothing, and Rugs. These pests specialize in finding the “expensive”, “favorite”, “collectable” types of things.

Pantry Pests



These pests are found in unprocessed foods such as dog and cat food, macaroni, cracker, cereal, chocolate, baking supplies, grains, rice, and other products you generally have to cook prior to consuming. In the situation that a product has been affected the eggs often are in the products when purchased, we bring them home and never know it because the product is used in a short period of time. It is when something has been around for a while that they begin to show up IF the eggs happen to be present. The eggs hatch into a worm looking larva, that larva eventually pupates into a beetle.



Pantry Moths are very similar in damage but the egg hatches into a worm looking larva that feeds on the food products. The larva eventually pupates into a moth. The moth flying around inside your home will only be seen on occasion, as it is a slow process and they seem to develop in 1's and 2's. If you are seeing moths on a regular basis or in large numbers then you likely have a serious infestation.

If you have the moths or see small beetles in your food storage area you will want to carefully inspect the products listed above. You will be looking for excess finely ground particles, beetles, maggot like worms, or webbing inside the package. These pests can be found in unopened products, zip lock bags, even sealable containers like Tupperware. Dispose of infested items and contact your pest control company for proper treatment.



Case Making Clothes Moths

These pests are generally much more damaging and difficult to resolve. They target natural fabrics like wool, silk, leather, wicker, 100% cotton, the clothing and objects we cherish and likely paid the most for. The preparation and treatment is extremely involved. Do NOT allow your pest control company to just install pheromone sticky traps. This will not solve your problem and more of your possessions will be destroyed while they are avoiding the hard work that needs done.

Moth Cocoons (The definitive sign you have a problem)

These cocoons are only about a ¼ inch long and can be seen hanging from the ceiling or shelves in a room they are active in. Often looking at the area where the ceiling meets the wall you will see them hanging. In general there will only be 1 cocoon here and there so look

carefully. Seldom will you find more than 15 of these in a room. Using a flashlight will make them more evident as the shadow makes them look larger.

If you need more information or help resolving these issues you are always welcome to contact our office and we will consult or provide service to resolve this and other pest issues.





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EMAIL ALERTS

Recently we installed a system that allows us to email our customers in the form of a mass email. Our intent for using this tool is to inform customers of things such as what to do prior to a freeze when one is expected and reminders when it is time to reduce or increase irrigation. So basically urgent things that will help you protect your investment.

We will never use this tool to market services. Our customer lists and contact information is protected by the most advanced systems available at all times.

We strongly intend to only provide our customers with valuable information through the year.

It is expected that we will send 6 to 8 alerts per year. We will keep the information as short and to the point as possible. Again, we want to stress we will not bombard your inbox or share your information with any other company.

If you have not already received an email alert from us we may have the wrong email or an error in the email we do have on file. You are welcome to contact our office by phone or email if you want the information sent to a different address, if you do not want to receive alerts, or if you want to add an email address.

Our office staff will be extremely happy to assist you.



EMAIL THE EDITOR ~ Do you have a question or comment you would like addressed in an upcoming newsletter?
Send them to qualityfirst@qfls.co

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