

Thatch can suffocate your lawn

Thatch build-up in the home lawn can prevent grass from having the breathing space it needs to grow properly.

"Thatch is the accumulation of old leaves, stems and grass clippings at the base of the grass plant," says Ray McNeilan, Oregon State University Extension home gardening agent.

Thatch causes many lawn problems.

The layer it forms prevents water and nutrients from reaching the roots of the grass. Thatch may also harbor weeds and plant diseases and it prevents the lawn from being cut at a correct height because it raises the cutting level of the lawnmower.

Fescues, bluegrasses and bentgrasses all develop a thatch of dead plant material

on the soil surface. Dwarf ryegrasses are slow to develop thatch.

Bentgrasses usually require yearly thatch removal, says McNeilan. Bluegrass and fescue lawns, on the other hand, require thatching less frequently.

Most of Oregon's bentgrass lawns are found in the Willamette Valley and on the Oregon coast. Bentgrass isn't used in most lawns east of the Cascades and doesn't grow well south of the Willamette Valley.

The size of the lawn dictates the type of dethatching tool that is most appropriate. A hand rake will do the job on lawns less than a thousand square feet in size. On larger lawns, thatching is more easily ac-

complished with a lawn dethatcher available on a rental basis at many garden stores.

To remove thatch, McNeilan suggests first mowing the lawn as low as possible and removing all the clippings. Then set the dethatcher to slice into the thatch close to the soil surface, go over the lawn and remove all the resulting debris.

After this step, run the dethatcher across the lawn again in a direction crosswise to the first cutting. After removing the debris a second time, set the lawn mower as low as possible and mow the lawn again. Removal of clippings from the last mowing completes the dethatching process.

The dethatching operation may leave the lawn in sad-looking shape, but according to McNeilan, the lawngrass will benefit a great deal and come back strong and healthy.

After thatching, you may want to thicken the grass stand by overseeding. If you haven't applied lime to the lawn in some time, do so now. Apply lime at the rate of 50-80 pounds per thousand square feet depending on how long it's been since lime was last applied.

Lastly, fertilize the lawn to bring on quick recovery and water thoroughly. In about three weeks the lawn should be completely recovered.

Strawberry growing is a delicate science

Successfully growing strawberries in the home garden requires liberal doses of effort and patience, but the returns are worth the investment.

New strawberry beds can be planted in the spring after the danger of severe frost has passed, says Ray McNeilan, Oregon State University Extension home gardening agent.

Most garden stores and nurseries have several strawberry varieties to choose from. For best results grow those varieties developed for Oregon climates because strawberries perform best in the area where they originated.

Two ajor types are available: June-bearing and everbearing. June-bearers produce one crop of berries in late spring or early summer. Everbearers produce one crop in June and another in late summer or fall.

In areas where late spring frosts may kill the June crop, everbearers usually provide a summer or fall harvest. Check with your local garden store or nursery for the best type of strawberry variety to grow in your area.

"Look for plants that are certified disease-free when buying strawberry transplants," McNeilan suggests. "Non-certified plants often carry several virus and pest problems.

Strawberries require fertile, well-drained soils, full sunlight and mild winter temperatures. They should be planted on a site that has good air circulation and no pockets for cold air or frost. Avoid planting strawberries in areas previously used to grow

tomatoes, potatoes, eggplants and non-certified berry plants to reduce the chance of diseases from contaminated soil.

Prior to planting, spread one quart of a dry 6-10-4 fertilizer, or one similar, uniformly over 100 feet of row area and work it into the top six inches of soil. When planting, spread the roots out and down and set the plant crown at soil level.

The matted row planting system is often used for June-bearers. Plants are spaced at 1½ to 2 foot intervals with rows 3 to 3½ feet apart. Then runners are allowed to develop and produce new plants that form a matted row 18 inches wide. The remaining space between rows is kept clear.

The hill system is preferred for everbearers, although it is also used for June-bearers. Plants are spaced 12 to 15 inches apart with rows 2½ to 3 feet apart. All runners are cut and removed during the growing season.

Six weeks after planting, apply one pint of ammonium nitrate per 100 feet of row and water it into the soil. Apply the fertilizer when the leaves are dry to avoid fertilizer burn to the leaves and crowns.

Remove the blossoms on newly planted June-bearing varieties during the first growing season to encourage growth for the next year. For everbearing types, blossoms may be allowed to develop after July for plants established in the spring.

FITS LIKE GLOVE

Ezekiel Case, in 1803, started manufacturing gloves in Gloversville, N.Y., a town that eventually became famous as a glove-making center. — CNS

HEART ON YOUR SLEEVE

Young European women in the Middle Ages would place their names in a box

on Valentine's Day and each young man would draw out one name. He would wear the name of his valentine — or sweetheart — on his sleeve for a year.

This supposedly gave rise to the expression "to wear your heart on your sleeve." — CNS

GIRL FORBIDDEN TO BUY NIGHTGOWN

Nightgowns were considered an affectation as late

as 1908, when a Chicago judge forbade an 18-year-old girl to buy such a garment against her father's wishes.

Said the judge, "A nightgown is ... undoubtedly not a necessity, particularly in this torrid weather. The only possible use of a nightgown is to keep off flies and mosquitoes, and the bedclothes will do just as well." — CNS

Dahlia time is upon us all

The over-anxious flower gardener will be glad to know that dahlia planting time has arrived. In areas where danger of frost has passed and the soil is dry enough to be worked, dahlias can go in the flower garden.

"For those gardeners who don't have stored dahlia plant material to use in the flower garden, most garden stores now have dahlia tubers in stock," says Ray McNeilan, Oregon State University Extension home gardening agent. "If you get tubers from the store, be sure to get the healthiest available."

Each tuber to be planted should have just one bud.

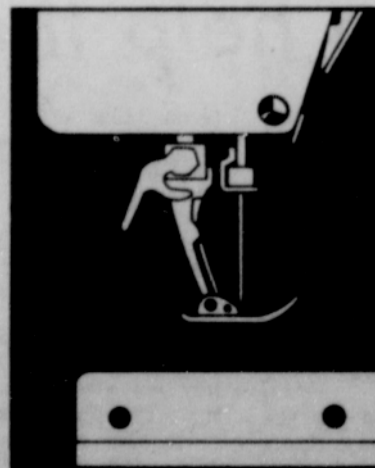
Making the planting hole four inches deep and large enough to lay the tuber horizontally in the hole. Cover the tuber with an inch of soil at planting, and fill the hole in gradually as the dahlia shoot grows.

Put a 1 x 2 inch stake next to each plant after planting to give support as the dahlia grows, McNeilan advises.

Place individual plants two feet apart for medium size dahlias, and four feet apart for tall growing types.

Don't allow more than one shoot to grow from each plant tuber. As the shoots grow up, attach them to the support stakes loosely with a light twine.

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