

## Meetings and Announcements

### Master Gardener Program

UC Cooperative Extension in Kern County has received funding for a Master Gardener (MG) coordinator. The funding cycle begins Oct. 1. Therefore, we hope to begin the MG program, probably next spring. The MG program offers classroom instruction in horticulture with a required volunteer-hour component. We have not had an MG program in Kern Co. since ca. 1993, when we moved to an educational outreach in horticulture without the volunteer component. I don't have plans for a horticulture class this fall and likely not until the MG program begins.

### Next Horticultural Tour?

I am exploring itineraries to visit gardens and landscapes in Japan. Certainly the horticulture there is exceptional. Yes, it's a long plane ride, but that has been true for many other places we've visited. I don't have a time frame yet for such a tour. The 2009 International Rose Symposium was held in Japan, and it was a good experience.

### Fall Turf Management

Especially if you walk a dog, you might notice lawns around your neighborhood in various stages of health or difficulty. Since fall is a transition time for turfgrasses and is also the best time of year to change from one turf type to another, let's consider what may be happening to several turfgrasses at this time of year.

Turfgrasses fall into two groups, warm season and cool season, in many ways opposites in preferences and adaptation. Warm season turfs like temperatures of 80-95 degrees, and possess drought and salinity tolerance. However, they turn brown and become dormant in winter. Common bermudagrass and hybrid bermudagrass are the most common warm season turfgrasses found around Bakersfield. In contrast, cool season grasses are well adapted to cold weather regions, stay green in our winters, and prefer temperatures of 60-70 degrees. High temperatures lead to stress, which may predispose the turf to disease. Tall fescue, often called "fescue," is the most common cool season turf in Bakersfield. In the Tehachapi and mountain areas, cool season grasses are frequently found. In desert landscapes, where turf is used, I have seen both warm and cool season grasses.

As we enter fall, tall fescue comes out of summer stress and enters a time more favorable for its growth. In the Rosedale area in particular, sandy soils often make it difficult to sustain tall fescue during August, and disease may cause loss of the stand. Since tall fescue is a bunch grass with limited lateral spread, it may be necessary to reseed or re-sod areas that have been lost. The best time for reseeding is October when day

temperatures are lower but still high enough for rapid seed germination. Many varieties of tall fescue are available, but avoid the old pasture-types 'Alta' and 'K-31.' The mowing height for tall fescue should be raised during summer to 2-3 inches, and fertilizer applied at a half-rate only to limit stress. Other cool season grasses, such as bluegrass, are generally not adapted to the valley floor, but new perennial ryegrasses are available that have much better heat tolerance than older varieties.

Bermudagrasses begin to slow in growth as we move into cooler weather. Bermudagrass is most susceptible to glyphosate (Roundup, other trade names) at this time of year, so if you want to change to another turf or relandscape, fall is the best time to kill the bermudagrass and switch to something else. Hybrid bermudagrass was developed to be a warm-season alternative to the bentgrass found on golf greens and tees, and it tolerates low mowing heights. However, mowing at heights below ½ inch will cause loss of root volume, causing the turf to thin and resulting in weed invasion. Hybrid bermudagrass needs a reel mower for an even cut. The water and fertilizer needed to keep the grass dense will result in thatch buildup.

Thatch is the undecomposed layer of turf stems between the green grass blades and the soil. Clippings from mowing do not contribute to thatch. In fact, not picking up clippings recycles nitrogen back to soil. About a half-inch of thatch is desirable, but more than that makes the lawn surface rise (often easily seen next to a driveway or sidewalk—see the upper photo at right) and leads to uneven mowing. Thatch can also provide an environment for diseases and insects. Hybrid bermudagrass and zoysia, such as 'El Toro', often need annual or bi-annual dethatching, whereas tall fescue develops little if any thatch. Common bermudagrass can develop thatch, but common bermuda is often not fertilized very much if at all, so thatch does not develop.

Thatch is often removed in autumn by "renovating" or power-raking. "Renovating" has several meanings, so if you want thatch removal from your crew be sure to communicate clearly. The tool needed is a power rake, shown at right, which has metal teeth that swing on rotating axles. Power rakes can be rented and you can do the job yourself. Set the unit's depth so thatch is removed but not soil. Two or more passes may be



necessary followed by raking to remove the debris from the lawn (lower photo), which can then be sent to green waste recycling.

The optimum timing for thatch removal does not coincide with the optimum timing for overseeding, although these two steps are often carried out together. If bermudagrass is not going to be overseeded, be sure to renovate early enough (September, early October) followed by a fertilizer application to allow the grass to recover before dormancy so weeds do not invade.

And one more thing--crabgrass plants can continue to enlarge in autumn. Herbicide treatment is not as effective in fall as compared to spring, and in a couple of months the crabgrass plants will die anyway. Regular mowing will limit seed-head formation. Other perennial weeds, such as dandelions or plantain, can be treated with herbicides throughout the fall. But, the key to weed management is a healthy, dense turf.

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