**September Garden Checklist**

By Kitty Angell, Aransas/San Patricio Master Gardener

Temperatures may still hit triple digits here in the Coastal Bend but the fall gardening season has started. Surely cooler temperatures are on the way.

Brown, dead-looking patches in the lawn can be caused by several things: chinch bugs, grubs, take-all patch, brown patch, drought or improper irrigation practices. I have an organic gardener friend who loaded her gun with different organic bullets this year.

Several cultural practices were used to reduce the likelihood of take-all patch moving in. The lawn was fed with an organic fertilizer and compost. In addition to providing nutrients and organic matter, compost increases the numbers of beneficial organisms, which compete with or actually attack, some plant disease-causing organisms. Mycorrhizal fungi were added to fight disease. They are good root-inhabiting fungi which may protect plant roots and which also greatly increase nutrient (especially phosphorus) uptake by roots. The spores of mycorrhizal fungi exist naturally in most soils (but likely not our almost 100% sand areas) and will germinate and grow if plant roots are present and when conditions are favorable. Instead of sulfur to acidify the soil, a half-inch layer of peat moss was spread. Take-all patch fungus cannot thrive in acid soil. Topdressing with compost completed the treatment. Even with virtually no rain and the very high temperatures this summer, the grass slowly sent runners into the bare patches. A second treatment is planned for fall since take-all patch fungus grows best in winter. Dr. Jerry Parsons, Texas A&M, suggests the planting of ‘Floratam’ St. Augustine grass. This variety is the most drought-tolerant of all St. Augustine grasses and has some resistance to chinch bugs, brown patch and take-all patch.

Brown patch, caused by *Rhizoctonia solani,* is one of the most common fungal diseases, occurring most often in fall with the cooler nights. While brown patch will not kill the grass, it certainly weakens it.This fungus thrives under conditions of cool night temperatures, high nitrogen fertilizers, poor drainage and extended rainy periods or over irrigating the lawn. Operate the irrigation system only when rainfall is scarce, do not water daily, and an inch a week is enough! Switch to an organic or a slow-release fertilizer. Organic fertilizers, slow-release by their very nature, not only help prevent over- fertilization, but promote the growth of beneficial soil microorganisms that fight brown patch. Fertilize in mid-October. Using a fungicide is only reduces the spread of the disease; decrease brown patch with the use of good gardening practices and proper irrigation methods.

To diagnose your lawn’s problem, take a sample of grass from the margin between the brown and green area in the lawn to the AgriLife Extension office. If it can’t be identified on sight, the sample can be sent to the lab at A&M for a small fee.

# In late September, fertilize all garden beds with 10 to 15 pounds of cottonseed meal per 1000 square feet, or a fertilizer such as Microlife, Soil Food or Texas Tea. Continue foliar feeding annuals, perennials and vegetables with compost tea and a water soluble organic fertilizer that contains micronutrients such as seaweed extract or fish emulsion.

# Snap beans with the best flavor are planted in the fall. They have a sweeter flavor than spring planted ones because they mature when temperatures are cool. Vegetables to plant include bush lima beans, bush snap beans, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, mustard and radish. In late September, plant beets, Swiss chard, Chinese cabbage, collards, kohlrabi and sugar snap peas. Interplant herbs with the vegetables. Contact the Extension office for a complete listing of recommended varieties and planting times for Aransas County.

# Give repeat-blooming roses a light trim now, removing any dead wood, thin or crossing stems, and old blooms down to the third or fourth 5-leaf outward facing bud.  Then add a layer of organic material such as compost or manure (horse manure is great and can be very fresh). Mulch on top of the organic matter will help with weed control and to moderate the heat! Dead-head spent blooms of other perennials and annuals to keep them flowering, but do not cut back any fall-blooming perennial such as asters, Mexican mint marigold, copper canyon daisy or Mexican bush sage. Early to mid-July is the time to cut back fall-blooming perennials.

# In late September, plant flowers from seed or plants of alyssum, calendula, cornflower, larkspur, delphinium, hollyhock, lobelia, petunia, snapdragon and stock. Save a few seed from purple coneflower for new plants, but leave the rest of the seed heads in the garden for the birds. Divide and transplant (or share with a friend) spring-blooming perennials such as daylily, Shasta daisy, violets, wood ferns, cannas and iris.

# Invite beneficial insects to your garden by planting herbs, annuals and perennials that attract them. Cilantro, dill, parsley, yarrow, alyssum, Queen Anne’s lace, asters and many other plants will draw beneficial insects to your garden next spring to fight the “bad guys”, insect pests.

# Fall is a great time to start a compost pile. For tips on earth-kind garden practices, including how to compost, propagate plants and harvest rain water, contact the Master Gardeners. For more in-depth information, you can sign up for the seven week Earth-Kind Landscaping Class. Contact the Extension office at (361)-790-0103 or [Aransas-tx@tamu.edu](mailto:Aransas-tx@tamu.edu) or go to [www.aransas-tx.tamu.edu](http://www.aransas-tx.tamu.edu) and click on “Earth-Kind Fall Landscape Class” for more information.