
GREEN PAGES

A newsletter for people interested in horticulture and natural resources in Western Wisconsin
September 2009 No.14

September Gardening Tips

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About this newsletter

This monthly newsletter's purpose is to disseminate research based information on topics of horticultural and natural resources in Western WI. In addition, it's purpose is to connect the public with local events of similar topics.

Fruit Plants

- ★ Mulch the soil around fruit trees, fruiting shrubs, raspberries, and blueberries with woodchips or shredded bark. Use shredded leaves or straw for strawberry beds.
- ★ Rake up leaves and fallen fruit to control disease and insect problems next year.

Herbs and Vegetables

- ★ Harvest eggplants when the fruits are 6 to 8 inches long and glossy.
- ★ Pick muskmelons when the fruit stem starts to separate from the fruit. Wait for the crack to appear all around the stem for a fully ripe melon.
- ★ Remove all weeds from garden before they go to seed.
- ★ Cover the garden when frost is predicted for up to another month of growth. Water plants well for greater frost protection.
- ★ Dig and pot parsley, chives, and tender herbs for transfer indoors to sunny window.

Lawns

- ★ Apply 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet. This is equivalent to 10 pounds of a 10 percent nitrogen fertilizer. The September fertilization helps lawns recover from the stresses of summer.

- ★ Fall is the best time to control perennial weeds, such as dandelions and plantain.
- ★ Wait to treat creeping charlie. Late fall applications, after a hard frost, of broadleaf weed killers will kill this weed. Keep in mind that more seeds are in the soil so it may take several years to eradicate this weed in your yard.

Perennials

- ★ Finish digging and dividing perennials as soon as possible. Try to finish this task in early in the month.
- ★ Lift gladioli corms when leaves begin to brown; dry in sun for a few days.
- ★ Divide most perennials except asters and mums that haven't bloomed.
- ★ Mulch should not be applied over roses or perennial flowers until after the ground has frozen (around Thanksgiving). Mulching before this time can attract rodents, prevent natural hardening of plants, and cause the soil to heave during winter. The heaving of soil can damage plant roots.

Shrubs

- ★ Fall cleanup begins for shrubs in September. Rake out leaves to reduce the chance of unwanted critters living in the plants during winter.
- ★ Plant spring-flowering shrubs in early September.

(Continued on page 3)

Robber Flies

by Susan Mahr

Robber flies are distinctive, medium-sized to large, bristly or hairy flies. There are about 850 species of robber flies (family Asilidae) in North America; 72 have been recorded from Michigan. The common name for this group comes from their ferocious manner of pouncing from the air on their prey. Various species of robber flies are common in different areas throughout North America.

Adults usually have an elongate body, with a slender and tapering abdomen, and are often hump-bodied. Most are gray, brown, or black, but a few species resemble bumble bees. Adults live about 3 months and can be seen throughout the summer. They frequent open sunny fields and are most common in semi-arid regions. They are fast and powerful fliers, able to capture insects much larger than themselves in flight. Robber flies respond to moving prey and are particularly attracted to flying insects. When disturbed or attacking prey they normally fly only a short distance,

and many produce a loud buzz when flying. The males are also quite territorial, so numbers of adults never seem great. Any stray male that wanders into another's territory is either chased or captured.

Females deposit small, cream-colored eggs on grass or other plants, soil, bark, or wood, depending on the species. Some eggs are laid singly, but most are deposited in large masses covered with a soft, chalky-white material. Some species create a shallow



Robber fly, *Dioctria* spp., with prey. Photo by David Cappaert, Michigan State University, Bugwood.org

hole in the soil in which to lay the eggs; others place their eggs in crevices on or under the bark of trees. The small, cream-colored, cylindrical larvae live in the soil or in decaying wood, migrating around to locate prey. They pierce the body of their prey and suck the body fluids from the wound. They generally feed on eggs or any soft-bodied insects that they encounter, although some seem to specialize on grasshopper eggs or white grubs. They overwinter as larvae and pupate in the soil. The pupae come to the surface of the soil

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Types of Lawn Grass

by John Stier

The long-term quality of a lawn begins with selecting the right species for the site.

Kentucky bluegrass is the most popular lawn grass in Wisconsin. It performs best in moist, well-drained soils and sunny locations. Kentucky bluegrass is cold tolerant and goes dormant during extended drought periods, growing new leaves after sufficient watering or rainfall.

Perennial ryegrass is frequently used in seed mixtures to provide quick cover due to its rapid germination. Perennial ryegrass should make up no

more than 15-25% of any mix; higher amounts will crowd out the more desirable grasses. Perennial ryegrass has strong fibers in its leaves and is often sold as the predominant species in mixtures formulated for high-traffic areas. However, it is not the best choice for high-traffic areas because it is a bunch-type grass and cannot spread. Also, it is not as tolerant as Kentucky bluegrass of cold temperatures or diseases. As a result, lawns composed solely of perennial ryegrass will thin out over time as disease, insects, and traffic kill individual plants.

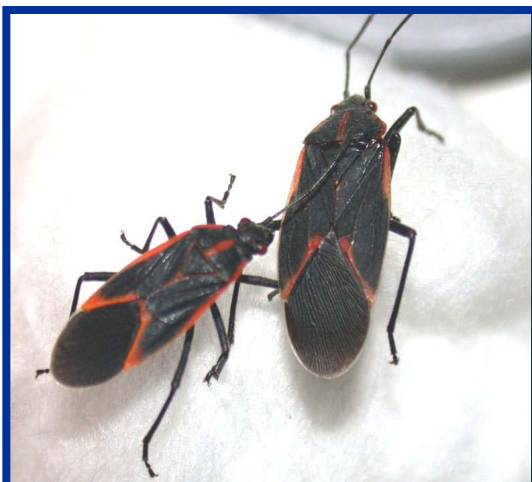
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Boxelder Bugs

by Rebecca Hoffman and Phil Pellitteri

Boxelder bugs, a true bug from the insect family Rhopalidae, are commonly found both outside and inside homes during the fall through early spring. Boxelder bugs are about $\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, and black in color with 3 red lines on the thorax and red lines on the wing margins. During the summer, they feed on leaves, flowers, and seedpods of boxelders and silver maples, where they do minor damage to the trees. Although completely harmless to humans, these bugs can be nuisances and occasionally their waste can stain.

Life cycle: Adult boxelder bugs lay eggs on trees in the spring. Nymphs emerge in 11 to 14 days and begin feeding on trees. Nymphs resemble adults, but are smaller and have more red on their bodies. Nymphs develop into adults during the summer, and lay eggs of a second generation of boxelder bugs that is active in August and September. Populations of boxelder bugs are highest after dry spells because wet weather promotes a fungal disease that is an important for population control. Boxelder bugs become a nuisance when second generation bugs



Adult Boxelder Bugs

congregate on the outsides of homes on sunny days

in September and October. Boxelder bugs then move indoors to find a protected place to overwinter. They remain in attics and wall voids until the spring when the bugs move back outdoors. Although boxelder bugs do not breed indoors, some may be active on sunny days in the winter.

Control: Because boxelder bugs are not harmful, methods of control are a personal preference. Removing all boxelder trees in an area will prevent breeding. Caulking windows and doors, and repairing window and door screens will prevent bugs from entering a home. You can also vacuum the bugs up with a hose attachment (to avoid staining fabric), but if vacuuming, dispose of the vacuum contents immediately or bugs can crawl out. If you decide you would

like to spray for control, one home remedy is to use a 3-4% mix of water and soap (by volume) that can be sprayed directly on the insects. Remember however that soaps only kill on contact. You can also have a professional apply insecticides to the sides of your home. Some insecticides are ineffective at cool temperatures, but insecticidal soap or sprays containing permethrin, cyfluthrin or esfenvalerate are effective.

September Gardening Tips (continued from page 1)

Trees

- ★ Do not prune lilacs, magnolias, forsythia and other spring-flowering plants now. Pruning now will remove flower buds from the branches. If possible, wait until after these shrubs are done blooming in spring.
- ★ It is usually best to allow fallen pine needles to remain below the tree. These needles will nourish and mulch the tree. If you wish, add pine needles to beds of acid-loving plants such as azaleas, Rhododendrons, and blueberries.

- ★ Oaks may be pruned from November until March.
- ★ Trees should be wrapped until they develop texture on their bark, which takes a few years. This wrapping will protect tree trunks from developing cracks caused by the scalding rays of the winter sun. Smooth, thin-barked trees such as maple, mountain ash, ash, crabapple, and apple are especially sensitive. Damaged trees can take several years to heal.

Root Rots on Houseplants

by Brian Hudelson and Laura Jull, UW-Horticulture

What is root rot?

Root rot is a general term that describes any disease where the pathogen (causal organism) attacks and leads to the deterioration of a plant's root system. Most plants are susceptible to root rots, including both woody and herbaceous ornamentals. Root rots can be chronic diseases or, more commonly, are acute and can lead to the death of the plant.

How do you know if your plant has a root rot?

Homeowners often become aware of root rots when they note that a plant is wilted, even though the soil is wet. Plants with root rots are also often stunted, and may have leaves with a yellow or red color, symptoms that suggest a nutrient deficiency. Careful examination of the root systems of these plants reveals roots that are soft and brown. These roots may have a bad odor.

Where does root rot come from?

A large number of soil-borne fungi cause root rots. Pythium spp., Phytophthora spp., Rhizoctonia solani, and Fusarium spp. are the most common root rot fungi. These fungi have wide host ranges, and thus can cause root rots on a wide variety of plants. Most root rot fungi prefer wet soil conditions and some, such as Pythium and Phytophthora produce spores that can survive for long periods in soil or plant debris.

How do I save a plant with root rot?

Often the best and most cost effective way of dealing with a plant with root rot is to throw it out. If you decide to keep a plant with root rot, REDUCE

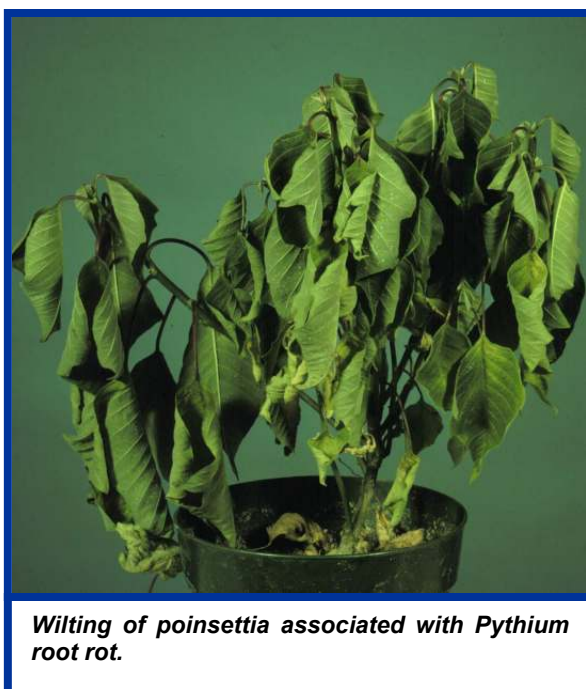
SOIL MOISTURE! Provide enough water to fulfill the plant's growth needs and prevent drought stress,

but DO NOT over-water. We DO NOT recommend use of chemical fungicides for control of root rots on houseplants because of the limited availability of products for use by homeowners, and because those products that are available tend to be expensive.

How do I avoid problems with root rots?

First, buy plants from a reputable source and make sure they are root rot-free prior to purchase. Second, replant your houseplants properly. Use a pot with drainage holes, but DO NOT put rocks or gravel at the bottom of the pot. The presence of rocks or gravel can actually inhibit drainage. Use a pasteurized commercial potting mix, NOT soil from your garden. Garden soils often contain root rot fungi. Add organic material (e.g., peat moss) to heavy potting mixes to increase drainage. Third, minimize potential contamination of your plants with root rot fungi. DO NOT reuse potting mix from your house-

plants, or water that has drained from your plants, as both potentially can contain root rot fungi. After working with plants with root rot problems, disinfect tools, working surfaces and clay pots with a 10% bleach or detergent solution, or alcohol. DO NOT reuse plastic pots as they are often difficult to disinfect adequately. Finally and most importantly, moderate plant moisture. Provide enough water to fulfill your plants' needs for growth and prevent drought stress, but DO NOT over-water. In particular, DO NOT allow plants to sit in drainage water. REMEMBER, root rot fungi grow and reproduce best in wet soils.



Wilting of poinsettia associated with Pythium root rot.

Herbicide Damage

by Brian Hudelson, UW-Madison Plant Pathology

What is herbicide damage? Herbicide damage is any adverse, undesired effect on a plant that is caused by exposure of that plant to a pesticide designed for weed control (i.e., a herbicide). Any plant can be subject to this problem.

What does herbicide damage look like? Symptoms of herbicide damage vary depending upon the plant affected and the herbicide used. Common symptoms include stems that are flattened, or that twist or corkscrew. Leaves may have abnormal shapes, sizes or textures. In addition, leaves or leaf veins may yellow or redden. In severe cases, plants may brown and die. Some plants, such as tomatoes and grapes, are particularly susceptible to herbicide damage and can be used as indicators of unwanted herbicide exposure.



Squash leaf distorted due to

How does herbicide damage occur? Herbicide damage results when a herbicide is misapplied. Herbicides for control of broadleaf weeds are occasionally applied with fertilizers as part of a lawn care program. If these products are applied too close to ornamentals or vegetables, or are applied when there is too much wind, then the herbicide can drift (move) from the area of application into an untreated area.

Often, drifting herbicides are difficult to de-

tect by eye because they are extremely fine mists and can better be detected by smell. Some herbicides readily produce vapors that can begin to drift several hours after application.

How do I save a plant that has been damaged by herbicides?

Don't panic! There is nothing you can do after plants have been exposed. However, most plants accidentally exposed to broadleaf herbicides applied with lawn fertilizers do not receive a high enough dose to kill them. Young growth exposed to the herbicide will be distorted and discolored, but subsequent growth will be normal.

How do I avoid problems with herbicide damage in the future?

When using a lawn herbicide, follow the application directions exactly. Don't apply the product too close to, or in a manner that will cause exposure to, non-target ornamentals or vegetables. To avoid drift, apply the herbicide when there is as little wind as possible (< 5 mph). Apply the herbicide at low pressure to minimize production of fine mists. Finally use amine forms rather than ester forms of herbicides as amine forms are less likely to produce vapors.

Cabbage Worms

Provided by UW-Extension Master Gardeners www.hort.wisc.edu/mastergardener/

Three species of caterpillars (imported cabbage-worm, cabbage looper, and diamondback moth) all feed on the leaves of cabbage, broccoli, and other cole crops. Usually they chew holes through the leaves or eat the surface, leaving tissue-like windows in leaves, but very small diamondback larvae tunnel inside the leaf. Much of the feeding is on the older leaves, which can be tolerated at moderate levels. The most serious damage occurs when they feed directly on the harvestable part of

the plant.

Control

- Use row covers to prevent adults from laying eggs on plants.
- The worms can be hand-picked from plants.
- Make Bt or chemical applications when larvae are less than ½ inch long (read the label FIRST).
- All three species are attacked by various parasites in the egg, larval and pupal stages, and can be affected by virus diseases.

Robber Flies *(continued from page 2)*

just before the adult emerges, leaving the pupal skin sticking out of the soil. The more common species require from one to three years to complete their development.

Adult robber flies are aggressive, generalist hunters. They have been recorded attacking butterflies, wasps, bees, dragonflies, grasshoppers, beetles, and other flies. Some of the larger species can inflict a painful bite if handled carelessly. Certain species frequently capture hornets or paper wasps, which are aggressive fighters themselves. At least 6 species in North America feed principally on grasshoppers. Most species, however, tend to feed more or less indiscriminately, destroying many destructive insects, but also beneficial ones such as honey bees and other pollinators. *Saropogon dispar* is the most injurious of a number of species in Texas that frequent apiaries – more than 700 of these flies were destroyed in one bee yard in a period of three days! Another species, *Proctacanthus milbertii*, is sometimes called the “Missouri bee killer,” although honey bees constitute only about

4% of its diet – the remainder is grasshoppers and moths. In the sandhills of Nebraska, *P. milbertii* captures nearly 2% of the adult grasshopper population daily, each consuming 1-2 prey per day. Several other species frequent flowering shrubs (such as *Prunus*, mockorange, or flowering sumac) where they feed on flies or wasps visiting the flowers.

The larvae of some species are reported to have a possible impact on carpenter bee, white grub and grasshopper populations. They may consume small grubs, root maggots, wireworms or other beetle larvae and insect eggs in gardens. *Diogmites discolor* was reported to have destroyed 12% of the *Phyllophaga* (white grub) population at one site in Kentucky.

Robber flies have not been used in biological control programs. Their role in natural control of pest species has not been well studied, even though they are common in some areas. Adults require sugar as well as protein before egg laying, so they may be encouraged by planting nectar-producing flowers, such as goldenrod or Queen Anne’s lace.

A Horticulture Information article from the Wisconsin

Types of Lawn Grass *(continued from page 2)*

Fine fescues are a group of fescue species known for their extremely narrow (fine-textured) leaf blades. This group includes creeping red fescue, Chewing fescue, and hard fescue. Fine fescues spread slowly or not at all, as some species have short rhizomes while other species have bunch-type growth habits. Fine fescues require less fertilizer, water, and mowing than Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass but often turn brown during summer. Fine fescues are often combined with Kentucky bluegrass to make a seed mix that works well in sunny and shaded environments. Over time, the fine fescues will dominate the shaded and/or drier sites while the Kentucky bluegrass will dominate the sunny and not so dry sites.

Rough bluegrass and supine bluegrass are light-green grasses that perform well in moist, shaded

areas. They spread rapidly and may develop into undesirable patches that are easily visible due to their light green color.

Turf type tall fescue provides a drought tolerant, medium-quality lawn. Tall fescue is a bunch-type grass that is suited for sandy soils where water and fertility will be minimal and which may receive traffic. Tall fescue usually should not be mixed with other species as its rapid growth rate, coarse leaf texture, and lighter green color give lawns an unkempt appearance. Dwarf types of tall fescue can be used as these mix fairly well with Kentucky bluegrass.



Events



"Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants in Our Gardens"

Dr. Tallamy will give his talk, "Bringing Nature Home How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants in Our Gardens" at 7:30, Schneider Building Room 100 at UWEC on October 29. Books will be available for purchase, sold by the student group, the Conservationists.

Tiffany Bottoms Wetland Train Ride



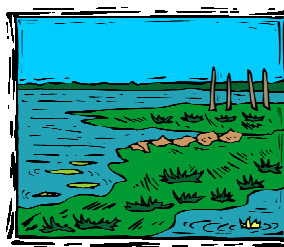
Date: Saturday September 12, 2009
Time: 09:30 AM to 03:00 PM

If you never experienced the Tiffany Wildlife Area, here's your chance to experience it, riding the rails through the Tiffany State Wildlife Area with the crew from Beaver Creek Reserve. Spend the day on an open-air, antique train while exploring the wetlands. The round-trip ride, approximately 14 miles, will be led by area naturalists and biologists discussing what makes these wetlands so unique and important to our plant and wildlife habitat. Pack a cooler with lunch and refreshments. We'll tour and hike the trails, 0.25–0.5 miles each. Be sure to dress for the weather and bring plenty of water. Rain or shine!

Location: Tiffany Wildlife Area Parking Lot Durand, WI
Directions to Tiffany State Wildlife Area: approximately a 45-minute drive from Eau Claire, follow Highway 85 to Durand and take Highway 25. Parking lot is about five miles south of Durand on left side of Highway 25. Look for Tiffany Wildlife Area Parking lot sign near the junction of Highway 25 and Thibodaux Road, which runs parallel to a railroad track.
Fee: Friends \$15 Nonmembers \$25

The Fall Marsh

Date: Saturday September 12, 2009
Time: 09:00 AM to 12:00 PM



Join naturalist, Mike Harden, for an interpretive walk at the Augusta Wildlife Area. Wetlands are among the most diverse habitats on the planet. Summer dies slowly in the marsh. In September the last flowers of summer still bloom, migrating birds congregate, insects celebrate their last hurrah and critters of all types can be seen preparing for the season ahead.

Location: Meet at the Reserve at 9 a.m. to carpool to the wildlife area or call the Reserve for directions to the site.

Fee: \$5 Friends \$7 Nonmembers

Booya & Fall Festival

Date: Saturday October 03, 2009
Time: 12:00 PM to 04:00 PM

Mark your calendar to attend this fun-filled family event complete with mouth-watering booya, food, games, raffles and other activities.

Location: In front of the Hobb Observatory - Beaver Creek Reserve Youth Camp Side



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Unless otherwise noted, articles for this newsletter are submitted and/or written by Eau Claire County UW-Cooperative Extension Horticulture Educator Erin LaFaive. Unless otherwise noted, graphics are from clipart.

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