

## Greetings

I hope you're doing well amidst whatever level of shutdown and activity you are experiencing. The plants at the office are growing well. The trees are larger. I notice our office courtyard landscape is starting to resemble something around Chernobyl. It's a quasi-abandoned look--no pruning with minimal or no attention to plant expansion.

## Meetings and Announcements

### **UCCE Kern County Office Situation--UCCE is still working!**

Our office on Mt. Vernon Ave. is currently open to the public. In accordance with the public health emergency declared by the County of Kern, all visitors are required to wear face coverings in all public places until further notice. Many of us advisors will be alternately in the office and working from home, and I have answered many questions via email, and new queries come in regularly from Kern residents as well as from those who live much further away. Email is the best way to reach me, my address is [jfkarlik@ucanr.edu](mailto:jfkarlik@ucanr.edu).

### **Weekly Zoom Presentation: Gardens and Design**

Again a reminder that I am making weekly Zoom presentations on gardens and landscape design, augmented with a bit of history. These presentations are Thursdays at 4:30 pm, and are based on photos from our past horticultural tours. The next presentation (September 17) will be about the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, with short digressions into climate change in Minnesota and a very unusual landscape feature west of Minneapolis: ancient gneiss, some of the oldest rocks on Earth. The following week, September 24, we plan to discuss the Chernobyl nuclear accident and take a look at ecosystem recovery in its vicinity. We will be taking a break in late September into October, but then plan to resume. Everyone on this mailing list should receive weekly a note with the Zoom meeting number and password.

## Renovation of Turf

The term "renovation" for turf can mean at least two things. It can mean replacement of a lawn area. More commonly, renovation refers to thatch removal. It's important to make clear the meaning in conversation!

Thatch is the undecomposed layer of stems between green grass leaves (blades) and the dark soil surface. Thatch accumulates as turf growth exceeds decomposition. Grasses with stolons (above-ground stems) are especially prone to thatch buildup, and these

include bermudagrass, especially hybrid bermuda. Water and fertilizer to increase growth rate also leads to thatch accumulation. Other grasses that build up thatch include the zoysias, such as 'El Toro', and bentgrasses used on golf course greens and tees. The bentgrasses need thatch removal on a frequent basis.

In general, about a half inch of thatch is desirable, since it provides a cushion and layer over soil. But a lot of thatch can provide habitat for turf diseases and other organisms deleterious to turf. Thatch buildup also raises the level of turf, interferes with irrigation, and makes the lawn "puffy," meaning mowing becomes uneven. A photo below shows a raised turf surface from thatch accumulation.

So, what to do? De-thatching, also called renovation (be sure to define the term), or power raking, is a cultivation practice. De-thatching is not necessarily routine for turfgrass, but it is for some grasses in the Bakersfield / Valley area. On hybrid bermuda, it is usually done on an annual basis and usually in the fall. On other turf types, it is also usually done in the fall. Because de-thatching tears up the turf, it needs to be done at a time when the turf can recover; in other words, while the turf is still growing. Many gardeners de-thatch bermudagrass followed by overseeding of winter grass, and that often occurs later in the fall, e.g., late October or November.

But I'm pleased to say I'm the first on my block to de-thatch, which happened a week ago from the time of this writing. I don't overseed in winter, and I want the turf to have time to recover and fill in so weed problems don't occur as a result of open spaces between turf plants.

The tool I used, and what is usually used, was a power rake, also called a renovator (no surprise). It has a horizontal axle with swinging teeth, and is set to a depth that will pull out thatch but not intrude much into soil. If a lot of soil is being pulled up, the depth is too low. Photos below show a power rake and also the result, the removal of thatch which is then raked and sent to greenwaste recycling. I may add a little fertilizer, and of course irrigation continues to allow turf to recover. I've successfully reset the level of the lawn. Mowing will be easier.





### How to Send a Greeting with Herbicides

Herbicides have many uses in turf and landscapes, and I think we can add another: sending a greeting. At first I thought what I was seeing was a clumsy use of a non-selective herbicide to remove late summer weeds. But no. Another look shows a heart with an arrow through it. I don't know any circumstances or to whom the message was directed. Certainly the heart message will be around for awhile since it will take turf time to recover.

Alternatively, a message could be written by careful application of fertilizer, so as to spell "O" for Oregon, or maybe "UCLA," or even the initials of the other school. That would give darker green turf set against lighter green, but not as dramatic as this one.



*John Karlik  
Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science*

**Disclaimer:** Discussion of research findings necessitates using trade names. This does not constitute product endorsement, nor does it suggest products not listed would not be suitable for use. Some research results included involve use of chemicals which are currently registered for use, or may involve use which would be considered out of label. These results are reported but are not a recommendation from the University of California for use. Consult the label and use it as the basis of all recommendations.

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