

Meetings and Announcements

Karlik announcement: Phase change

If you missed it last month, I have officially retired as of July 1, 2022. However, I consider this to be a phase change. Let me explain what that means.

In chemistry, a phase refers to a state of matter, e.g., solid, liquid, or gas. A phase change is then the altering of that state, usually by adding or withdrawing heat to increase or decrease molecular motion. For example, for water, a phase change occurs when liquid water becomes ice or vice versa. It's the same stuff, just arranged differently. Similarly, I am still the same person and associated with UC Cooperative Extension, and I have what we call emeritus status, which means I can work on projects (but not be paid). My email is still active, and I am helping out at the office in various ways.

We have been talking about restarting a Master Gardener program in Kern, which we had about 30 years ago. Since that time, I've offered many horticulture classes, but we have not had a volunteer component associated with them. I will not "drive" any Master Gardener program, but I do plan to assist if the office decides to begin one.

A Publication on Principles of Xeriscape

I have been working on a publication on the principles of xeriscape, that is, water-conserving landscapes. It has passed the copy-editing stage at UC Communications and is now in the layout stage. Should be ready soon. It discusses the seven principles of xeriscape design and what steps are most important to save water in landscape irrigation. I will let you know when it is released. We wait.....

Roses

August is a good time to cut back hybrid tea and grandiflora roses for a September bloom. Autumn is just around the corner, although it might not feel like that just yet.

Later Summer Turfgrass Problems

Later summer is the time when some grasses are reaching the end of a period of annual stress, while other grasses would be happy with lots more warm weather! In August and early September, certain turf problems can become obvious, and it's a good time for corrective action.

Turfgrasses fall into two groups, warm season and cool season, that in many ways have opposite characteristics. Warm season grasses do well with temperatures of 80-95 F, possess drought and salinity tolerance, but turn brown and go dormant in winter. Common

bermudagrass and hybrid bermudagrass are the most common warm season turfgrasses found around Bakersfield. In contrast, cool season grasses prefer temperatures of 60-70 F and stay green during Bakersfield winters. High temperatures lead to stress in cool season turfs, which may predispose the turf to disease. Tall fescue, often called “fescue,” is the most common cool season turf in the Bakersfield area.

In late summer bermudagrasses and other warm season types should be growing vigorously, but unsuitable management practices can take a toll. Hybrid bermudagrass needs a reel mower (“front-throw”) for an even cut, using a rotary mower will result in an uneven and patchy look. Hybrid bermuda was developed to be a warm-season alternative to the bentgrass found on golf greens and tees, and it does tolerate low mowing heights. However, mowing at heights below a half-inch will cause loss of roots, since the plant responds by directing its energy to shoot growth. With a very low mowing height the lawn at first has a velvet pool-table look, but gradually, over a period of months, the turf will thin and open up, resulting in weed invasion. This is the most common turf problem I see around Bakersfield. Try raising the cutting height of the mower if turf does not fill in or if weeds seem to be spreading.

For tall fescue, on sandy soils in the Rosedale area in particular, it may be difficult to sustain the grass during August, and disease may cause loss of the stand. The disease symptoms are often typical of Pythium blight, a disease caused by a fungus. Keeping the mowing height above two inches helps reduce turf stress and increases resistance to the fungus. Pythium is opportunistic and sensitive to temperature and humidity. More specifically, wet conditions, warm nights and high humidity favor the disease. Irrigation should occur in the early morning so turf dries off during the day, but during a heat wave it may be helpful to cool the turf by lightly irrigating in mid-afternoon. Fungicides may be helpful, but timing and coverage are important, and turf fungicides are very specific for certain diseases, so not just anything will be effective. Since tall fescue is a bunch grass with limited lateral spread, it may be necessary to re-seed 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.

Keeping nitrogen in the middle range is helpful since turf diseases tend to prefer either high or low nitrogen. Similarly, water stress or over-watering can favor disease, so irrigating sufficiently is best. What is sufficient depends partly on the site, such as how much sun the grass receives.

Regarding weeds, crabgrass plants continue to enlarge in late summer. Herbicide treatment for crabgrass is not very effective in late summer, and in a couple of months the plants will die, so if control is necessary it’s often best to wait until very early spring and prevent seed germination with a pre-emergent herbicide. Other perennial weeds, such as dandelions or plantain, can be treated with herbicides throughout the fall. But, the most important aspect of weed management is to maintain a healthy, dense turf through favorable cultural practices such as mowing, irrigation, and fertilizer application.

John Karlik Environmental Horticulture/Environmental Science

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