What can I do about the dead areas in my St. Augustine lawn?

Getting to the root of the problem is the most important step – that could be literal. Southwest Florida Water Management District ran ads this year with the message, “Skip a Week” encouraging homeowners to only water every other week instead of weekly. In the cooler weather, the ground doesn’t dry as quickly nor is the grass actively growing. This was especially appropriate this year as we had an unusually wet winter and spring. Applying more moisture than your grass roots are able to absorb can lead to fungal diseases and rotting roots. For a healthier lawn, follow the adage that less is better and only irrigate when your grass indicates it is thirsty by exhibiting symptoms such as folded grass blades with dull color that don’t bounce back when walked upon.

As we get into warmer weather, chinch bugs may also be a problem. You can use a couple of different methods to examine your grass to see if they are present. In the area adjacent to the affected area, insert a coffee can into the soil and pour soapy water in the can. If chinch bugs are present they will come to the top of the grass blades to escape the soapy water. It’s also possible to see them run on top of the soil if you spread grass blades apart. When a chemical treatment is used, it’s important to rotate chemicals so the insects don’t build up a resistance. Remember too, don’t apply a chemical when it is not needed.

There are caterpillars everywhere – on my trees and on some of my tomatoes and flowers.

Many times, this is a seasonal event on trees and will only last a few days to a couple of weeks. Seldom does their presence actually stress the tree although it can be alarming and cosmetically blemishing.

Two of the more common pests on tomatoes are hornworms and fruit worms. The hornworm is actually the larval stage of a moth whereas the fruit worm is always a worm. Both can ruin the fruit, but the hornworm can defoliate a large plant in 24 hours.

Depending on the flowers being attacked, the caterpillar may be the larval stage of a moth or a butterfly. Butterflies are usually plant specific and will only lay their eggs on one host plant. For example, the monarch butterfly only lays its eggs on milkweed plants. If the flower under siege is an oleander, the culprit is an oleander moth.

Proper identification is prudent before applying any chemical controls. If you need assistance, you can take the insect to any of our Help Desk locations or you can email pictures to the Master Gardener Help Desk mghelpdesk@scgov.net. Use care in collecting caterpillars because some have spines that are connected to poison glands. Contact can lead to itching, burning or a severe reaction.

Master Gardener Recruitment Time
Once a year, new Master Gardeners are recruited and trained to be a part of this volunteer program. There are no prerequisites, just a genuine desire to volunteer your time to assist others in the community. If you are interested, visit our website for more information http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu or attend the upcoming orientation program on June 2.

PLANTING GUIDE

Vegetables & Herbs: Anise, beans, black-eyed peas, borage, catnip, chervil, cilantro/coriander, comfrey, corn, cumin, dasheen, eggplant, marjoram, mint, okra, oregano, peas, summer savory, sweet potatoes, tarragon and watermelon.

Annuals: Ageratum, Begonia, Celosia, Cleome, Coleus, Cosmos, Crossandra, dusty miller, marigold, morning glory, Nicotiana, periwinkle, Portulaca, Salvia, sunflower, Torenia, Verbena and Zinnia.

Perennials: Blue daze, Caladium, Coreopsis, Dahlberg daisy, daylily, Gaillardia, Gaura, Gerbera daisy, Kalanchoe, Mexican heather, Pentas, Rudbeckia, Salvias, shell ginger, shrimp plants, Tithonia and Verbena.

Fruits in Season: Banana, blackberry, blueberry, carambola, citrus, (calamondin, grapefruit, key lime, lemon, and lime.), guava, kumquat, loquat, macadamia, papaya, pineapple, Surinam cherry, and tamarind.

Blooming Plants: Amaryllis, birds of paradise, crape jasmine, daylily, Gardenia, Jacaranda, Jerusalem thorn, Magnolia, Mexican flame vine, natal plum, oleander, pipevine, Plumeria, silk oak Simpson’s stopper, star jasmine, Texas sage, and Yucca.

Upcoming classes
Call 861-9900 to register for the following classes.

- Grafting, Orange Blossom Community Garden, 18th & Orange, 1:00 p.m. May 1
- Landscape Design for Homeowners, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. May 5
- Termites in the Home, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. May 5
- What to do about Ants, Shamrock Park, 2:00 p.m. May 6
- Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Nine Landscape Principles, Gulf Gate Library, 2:00 p.m. May 7
- Rain Barrel Workshop, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. May 8
- Fire Ants, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. May 11
- Organic Vegetable Gardening, Laurel Community Garden, Forest & Collins, Laurel, 10:30 a.m. May 15
- Bed Bug Menace, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. May 18
- Annuals & Perennials for Florida, Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. May 19
- Florida Snakes, Shamrock Park, 2:00 p.m. May 20
- Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Creating Your Florida Yard, Longwood Park, 10:30 a.m. May 22
- Insect Pests of Woody Plants, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. May 26
- Irrigation 101, Twin Lakes Park, 4:00 p.m. May 26
- Household Pests, Twin Lakes Park, 1:00 p.m. June 1
- The Master Gardener Program – Is it for You? Twin Lakes Park, 10:00 a.m. June 2
• Florida Yards & Neighborhoods: Creating Your Florida Yard, Gulf Gate Library, 2:00 p.m. June 4

**For information**
The Master Gardener Help Desk now has an email address: mghelpdesk@scgov.net to answer questions. It is open Monday-Friday from 9:00 a.m.-Noon and 1:00-4:00 p.m. You can call (941-861-9807) or visit our office at Twin Lakes Park on Clark Road east of I-75 with landscape questions. We also have weekly satellite help desks at the four south county libraries and every Monday at Gulf Gate Library.

(Patricia Porchey is an Urban Horticulture Agent with University of Florida/IFAS Sarasota County Extension. Website: [http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu](http://sarasota.extension.ufl.edu))

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