



UNIVERSITY OF
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IFAS EXTENSION

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Did you know that fall was just around the corner and only a few short weeks ahead? Do you feel the crispness in the air yet? Can you just imagine the leaves changing colors from bright green to vibrant yellows, reds, purples and oranges? Well, no I can't either and we probably won't ever feel that way here in Indian River County. Summers here can seem to last forever and even the most avid fan of hot, humid weather usually yearns for at least a few cool evenings when September finally rolls around. The great thing about living in this type of environment is that you can garden all year round; the bad thing is that you can garden all year round. It is a double-edged situation and one that we can either enjoy and work our way through, or we can give up the fight and complain about all of the pests and diseases for the next month or so. I prefer a mixture of the two; although I like to see things grow and bloom throughout the rainy season, I am not one to pass up the opportunity to complain about all of the extra hard work that goes into late summer gardening.

One of the most common homeowner question that we get into the Master Gardener plant clinics this time of year is about lawn fertilization. It seems that there is a big advertising push to fertilize lawn turfs anywhere from mid to late summer. You can see that by the amount of fertilizer commercials that you see on TV right now, or the sale circulars from the home garden centers or newspaper articles that discuss the need for a "summer feeding". Unfortunately, most of this information is based upon northern lawns and not appropriate for most of south Florida. In order to prevent misuse of fertilizers we need to be aware of a few important factors before we get out the fertilizer spreader.

Our sandy soils usually have a higher pH, which means that they are very alkaline in nature. Alkaline soils are known to have a very low iron content, which can create a deficiency in turf grass. You can find out your soil pH by bringing in a small sample to the extension office and having the Master Gardeners run a pH test on it. This can be done in the office but for a more extensive analysis you will have to send the sample off to the University of Florida in Gainesville. Our county extension office has packing material and pre-addressed boxes for you to send your sample in. Test results are usually returned within two to three weeks and you can bring your results back into our office for a consultation.

The symptoms for an iron deficiency are very similar to those of nitrogen deficiency and detecting the difference can be difficult for the average homeowner. Since the solutions to these two problems are completely different, it is important to identify the problem correctly.

This preliminary identification step can help you save time, energy and money. It can also help prevent the over utilization of fertilizers which is one of the leading causes of nonpoint source pollution. Blades of grass that have an iron deficiency will be seen on young, actively growing leaves. They will be yellow but the veins will still be green. The growth of the turf grass will probably not be affected but the discoloration will occur in blotchy or patchy areas. On the other hand, a nitrogen deficiency will exhibit itself in the yellowing of the oldest leaves first and the overall turf color will be light green to yellowish-green. Nitrogen deficiency will also affect most all of the lawn (not patchy) and the growth of the turf itself is often stunted and thin.

If you have been on a regular fertilizer regime and did apply fertilizer in the spring then usually a summer yellowing problem can be attributed to an iron deficiency. Once you have determined that it is an iron deficiency you will need to apply a treatment of iron supplement and not nitrogen fertilizer. This can be done as a granular or foliar application and results are amazingly fast. There are several inorganic forms of iron that are available as supplemental sources of iron. Product labels often provide the percent of iron in the supplement but do not state the form of the iron. If the iron source is not in the correct form for your particular soil situation, it does little to correct the deficiencies.

Iron supplements can be found in home garden centers, and product selection is based upon consumer preference. It is important to remember though where iron-deficiencies are more likely to occur (high soil pHs); iron oxides are not soluble enough to correct the problem. One form of iron supplement that does work well in our area is chelated iron. This form of iron is generally more effective than soluble inorganic iron sources for soils with higher pHs. Another benefit is that iron chelates require lower rates than the inorganic sources and they are considerable cheaper. Chelated iron is also more effective when it is foliar applied.

If you would like to learn more about gardening and landscaping in our area and have the desire to share that knowledge with others there are still a few open slots in the Master Gardener New Volunteer training. This training will start September 7 and go through November 23 meeting every Tuesday from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm. Contact the extension office for more information.

The Indian River County Extension office is located at 1028 20th Place, Suite D, and the telephone number is (772) 770-5030. You can email your questions or comments to our agents at indian@ifas.ufl.edu or visit our website at <http://indian.ifas.ufl.edu>.