

Lawn, Citrus and Veggie Care in February

by Jane Morse, University of Florida/IFAS Manatee County Extension Agent

St Augustine lawn care:

Mow the lawn at 2 ½ to 3 inches high and remove only 1/3 of the leaf blade each time it's mowed. Be sure that the mower blade is sharp. Leave the clipping on the lawn unless clumps form, or if there is disease present (mow those areas last).

Fertilize two weeks following spring regrowth, usually mid February. Apply a complete fertilizer such as 16-4-8 (the first number on the bag is the percent of nitrogen, the second is the percent of phosphorous and the third is the percent of potassium). Use slow-release fertilizers. Keep fertilizer applications at least 10 feet away from a water source, and keep applications away from the sidewalk or road (sweep back onto lawn). Apply 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet (100 ft x 10 ft = 1,000 square feet). Applying fertilizer before a rainstorm will cost you money because the fertilizer will be washed away, and pollute our waterways.

How much of my fertilizer will supply a pound of nitrogen? Example: If the fertilizer is 16-4-8, then $100 \div 16 = 6.25$. This means that 6.25 pounds of this fertilizer will supply 1 pound of nitrogen to 1000 square feet. If the first number on the bag is 8, then $100 \div 8 = 12.5$. You will have to use 12.5 lbs from this bag of fertilizer to apply 1 pound of nitrogen over 1000 square feet. A bathroom scale can be used to measure weight.

If the soil pH is 7 or higher use ammonium nitrate or ammonium sulfate as a fertilizer source. This will help to acidify the soil. A high (alkaline) soil pH can also cause iron deficiency (grass will have yellow appearance). Spray ferrous sulfate (2 ounces in 3 to 5 gallons of water per 1000 square feet). Iron can be applied every 6 weeks to keep the grass looking green, and unlike nitrogen, it will not promote growth (that's good unless you like to mow a lot).

Water is usually not critical during the winter months because the days are short and the cooler temperatures keep plants rather dormant. It is best to get a deep root system developed for our periods of drought by watering ¾ of an inch only when you see the grass begin to wilt. It will turn a blue-grey color and foot prints will remain for quite some time. Remember to water in the early morning when dew is still present. Watering early in the day, so the grass has time to dry, will help prevent fungal diseases.

Weeds are seldom a problem in a healthy lawn. Proper mowing height, fertilization and watering must be followed to have a lawn that can outcompete weeds. To keep weed seeds from sprouting apply a pre-emergent herbicide usually in mid February (when day temperatures reach 65 degrees to 70 degrees Fahrenheit for 4 or 5 days in a row).

As the weather begins to warm, keep an eye out for chinch bugs. Damaged areas are first noticed along sidewalks or other areas that tend to dry out and are in full sun.

Citrus

Fertilize those trees. If you didn't fertilize in late January, then fertilize in February. An 8-8-8 fertilizer that also has micronutrients is a good choice. Young trees need small amounts of fertilizer frequently (up to 6X a year). For trees over 5 years, apply one pound of fertilizer per year of tree age up to a maximum of ten pounds per application three times each year. Broadcast the fertilizer under the tree canopy starting about a foot away from the trunk.

Control scab on Temple oranges using a copper fungicide. Copper will also control Alternaria on Dancy tangerine and Minneola tangelo.

Insects such as aphids may become a problem on new growth of young trees. These can be washed off with a jet stream of water, or the aphids can be sprayed with either insecticidal soap or horticultural oil. Older, bearing trees can usually withstand the slight damage and can be left alone.

Citrus leaf miner (on new growth) mainly just looks bad. Since the small caterpillar is between the leaf surfaces, there is not much that can be done. Young trees can be sprayed with a horticultural oil twice, spaced two weeks apart. This will discourage the leaf miner moth and will provide some protection for new growth.

Vegetables

Plant warm season veggies: Bush, pole or lima beans, cantaloupes, sweet corn, cucumbers, eggplant, peppers, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, summer or winter squash, tomatoes.

You can still plant some cool season veggies in February: Celery, collards, parsley, potatoes, radish and turnips.

For more in-depth information on any of these subjects, call the University of Florida/IFAS Manatee County Extension Service at 722-4524 and ask to speak to a Master Gardener (available Monday-Friday, 9 AM to 4 PM). We have lots of FREE publications to help you.