Answers to two hot topics: winterizing lawns & growing spinach

Q. Should I “winterize” my lawn?

A. If you’ve done a good job fertilizing your lawn during the growing season (spring and summer), there’s no reason to apply more fertilizer now. Many people have bought into the idea of “winterizing” their lawns. But the worst thing to do is to apply a high-nitrogen fertilizer late in the season. Excessive nitrogen can stimulate tender new growth in our warm-season grasses here in the South only to result in cold injury during the winter.

If you’ve not adequately fertilized during the growing season, your lawn may benefit from additional potassium. On the other hand, if you’ve fertilized properly and the lawn’s color is normal and you’ve had to mow regularly, more than likely the potassium level is okay. But the only sure way to know if the potassium level is inadequate is to have your soil tested, otherwise you’re guessing.

If you insist on winterizing, use a fertilizer with low nitrogen (represented by the first number in the fertilizer analysis) and high potassium (the last number in the analysis). Some examples include 5-2-14, 5-0-22, 8-2-34 and 9-2-24. Remember, more potassium than nitrogen. Unless a soil test reveals the need for phosphorus, the center number (phosphorus) also should be low.

If you insist on winterizing, fertilizer needs to be applied while the grass is actively growing, when the grass can readily take it in. After the lawn is dormant and when the soil temperature is cooler, much of the fertilizer that could have benefited the grass is wasted.

The latest date to fertilize our warm season grasses like centipede and St. Augustine in North Florida as recommended by UF/IFAS turfgrass researchers is mid September. But with centipedegrass, it’s best to not fertilize after August.

Q. With recent concerns about E. coli in spinach, can I grow my own spinach in North Florida? If yes, when should it be planted?

A. Certainly, spinach (Spinacia oleracea) can be grown in the home garden in our area. It’s a cool season crop and should be planted October through November. It’s hardy, withstanding freezing better than most vegetables.

Also, New Zealand Spinach and Malabar spinach can be grown in our area. But unlike common spinach, these leafy green vegetables can be grown during summer months and are tender to frost. Malabar is not a true spinach. The plant is a vine. Its leaves resemble spinach and are eaten in the same manor.

Additional information on growing your own vegetables is available at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Vegetable_Gardening](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/TOPIC_Vegetable_Gardening) or by contacting your local UF/IFAS Extension Office.
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