Pest Corner

July, 2007

Adapted from WSU sources and Don Tapio, GH County Extension Agent.

Lawn & Water

Observe the lawn regularly to assess appearance and need for watering. If answer is YES to all of the following questions, then lawn **does not** need immediate watering: Does it appear lush, but not wet? Do grass blades spring back in a few minutes after being walked on? Can you push a screwdriver five to six inches into the soil easily? Turn the sprinklers on when parts of the lawn appear to change color (usually from blue or green to grayish blue), the turf leaves begin to roll; the turf stays down after being walked on; and you cannot push a screwdriver into the soil easily.

Without supplemental water during the summer months, growth of most of our lawn grasses will cease and grass will turn brown and go dormant. Dormant grass is in a resting stage and will normally revive when rains and cooler temperatures return in the fall.

Leaving clippings on the lawn saves your time, energy and money. Grass clippings contain valuable nutrients that can generate up to 25 percent of your lawn's total fertilizer needs. A hundred pounds of grass clippings can generate and recycle as much as three to four pounds of **N**, one-half to one pound of **P**, and two to three pounds of **K** back to the lawn. Grass clipping do not contribute to thatch since they are 75 to 80 percent water, and quickly decompose.

Growing Potatos and Tomatos

Green tubers ("sunburning") happen by exposure to light either while growing in the garden or in storage. There may be an increase in solanine (a glycoalkaloid) to potentially high levels. Higher solanine content gives a bitter taste to potatoes after being cooked. Because glycoalkaloids are slightly toxic, you can become ill if you eat too much of a green potato. Since most of the solanine is in, or under the skin, simply peeling the potato will remove most of it.

Prevention: Hill the plants. Pulling loose soil up around the plants prevents tubers from emerging through the soil and becoming green form the sun. The additional loose

soil also allows the developing tubers to expand easily up into the growing areas. Hilling also buries and kills weeds around the plants before they become a serious and time-consuming problem. It also prevents late blight spores being washed down into tubers.

Potato and Tomato Late Blight

Sanitation and Cultural Controls: Destroy all plants and plant parts that have or carry the late blight fungus. Always plant certified potato seed pieces or tomato seedlings. Do not plant potato tubers with rots and/or skin lesions.

Avoid over-fertilization with N to avoid dense plant growth. Dense foliage favors retention of moisture. Humidity is favorable for late blight in potato and tomato plants. Irrigate to minimize periods of leaf wetness. Avoid overhead watering or water only in the middle of the day so foliage will be dry before evening. No disease should develop if plants are kept dry.

Situate plants in a protected area such as next to a wall under extended eaves. Clear polyvinyl shelters offer protection from rain, but should allow air circulation from the sides. If favorable weather for late blight has occurred, closely monitor plants and remove any suspicious foliage or shoots.

Remove and destroy severely infected or dead plants (or plant parts) during the season. Greenhouse tomato growers also should properly dispose of infected plants and plant parts.

Harvest potato tubers after vines are completely dead. In a home garden, vines can be killed by cutting the tops an inch or so below the soil surface, or waiting for frost. Tubers harvested 2-3 weeks after all tops have been removed or killed develop less storage rot. Also, stop irrigation about two weeks or so before harvesting the tubers. Burn, bury deeply, or freeze the potato tops. Do not place them on the compost pile (back yard compost piles may not reach sufficient temperatures to kill specialized survival spores called oospores, if they are present). Follow the same procedures for infected tomato plants and fruit. If available, plant those varieties that show resistance in the local area.

Chemical Control: Fungicide may protect leaves, vines, and fruit from infection. During summers with extended periods of dry weather, usually no applications will be necessary. However, rainy days and heavy dews during mid-July, August, and September (in western Washington) can encourage disease development. For the fungicides selected, make certain that the plant name and late blight are indicated on the label. Read and follow all label directions prior to any use!