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## AGRIVIEW

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Landscape preparation for a summer vacation may sound like a lot of extra work, but is really not much more than the normal weekend routine of maintaining a healthy, well-groomed landscape. Just a little extra effort on your part before leaving can make a big difference in the health and well-being of your plans. Here are some practical tips that should help ensure that your home landscape will not suffer the post-vacation blues, and don't forget to visit some gardens while you are away. There are many spectacular gardens to enjoy in just about any part of the county where you may be headed.

**WATER** – Water the home grounds well prior to leaving. Soak your lawn, garden and all landscape plants deeply. Our shallow soils can dry out rapidly even after a heavy watering, so if you will be gone for a week, plan to have a neighbor hook up your hose and do a little supplemental watering.

**CUT** – Mow your lawn a day or two before you leave. Use the same cutting height that you normally do. Don't lower the mower blade for a "closer shave". Doing so could easily cause sun scald and damage. If you plan to be gone more than a week, it would be a good idea to

arrange to have a friend or neighbor mow the lawn for you. Prune hedges and other plants likely to get gangly by the time you return. Be sure that walks and flower beds are neatly edged before your departure. A buildup of growth while you are away will be difficult to manage on your return.

**MULCH** – Mulching helps conserve valuable moisture for plant growth while you are at home or away. Choose a clean mulch, free of weed seed and one which will remain loose and well aerated. Consider grass clippings, pine bark, compost or a variety of other organic materials. Mulching will also reduce or eliminate the weeding problem.

**CHECK FOR INSECTS AND DISEASE** – Spray, if necessary, for insects and disease, to prevent a buildup of pests during your absence. Summer insects and diseases do not take a vacation, and will work overtime on your healthy plants. This goes particularly for chinch bugs. Make sure you have applied chinch bug control to your St. Augustin lawn, or you just might find it severely damaged by this little critter when you return.

**HARVEST** – Pick all ripe or nearly ripe fruit and vegetables. If you will be gone over a week, arrange for friend to pull and use produce. Vegetables left unpicked will frequently cease to bear.

**PROTECT PROPERTY** – Arrange for a neighbor to pick up newspapers, or ask the paper delivery service to hold them until you return. Newspapers scattered over the front lawn are a dead giveaway that no one is home. Lights on a timer are a good idea, and can provide an impression that someone is home.

Diseases can occur on home lawns throughout the summer months, especially in shaded areas with abundant moisture. This fungus causes diamond-shaped tan to gray spots with brown or purplish borders on the leaf.

To control gray leaf spot, avoid using soluble nitrogen fertilizers. Water the lawn in early morning and only when footprints can be seen in the grass or the leaves start curling.

Late afternoon and evening watering encourages diseases by keeping the leaf surface wet for long periods. Catch and remove clippings where gray leaf spot is a problem. Several fungicides are effective for gray leaf spot control.

Bermudagrass may develop a fungus called helminthosporium (Hel-MIN-tho-spore-ium). This fungus causes small purplish to black spots on leaves, stems or crowns of infected plants. Severely infected leaves may die and appear straw colored. When temperatures are high, the fungus attacks the crowns and stolons, thinning large areas of the lawn in irregular patterns.

Helminthosporium is often associated with other stresses such as low fertility, drought and soil compaction. A soil test will help determine how the lawn should be fertilized. Additionally, aeration and good drainage also reduce helminthosporium.

Don't water too much or too frequently. Fungicides can protect the grass during high disease activity but preventive applications are more effective than treating severe outbreaks after they occur.

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