

August 7, 2015

AGRIVIEW

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August is perhaps the most trying month for plants and people in East Texas. Lets go through a quick checklist of gardening chores that you don't want to neglect in late summer.

Water the lawn and garden thoroughly when needed, then wait until almost dry before watering again. Be on the lookout for chinch bugs in lawns. These tiny insects can wreak havoc with turfgrass if not stopped in a good amount of time. If grub worms were a problem last year then treat with an approved insecticide if you suspect problems this year. Deep, thorough watering encourages root penetration and conserves water in the long run. Don't forget to use generous amounts of mulch in and around the flower, vegetable and shrub beds. Shallow rooted plants such as dogwoods, camellias and azaleas need plenty of moisture as they begin to set flower buds for spring blooms.

This is also a good time to shape rose bushes. Cutting out weak growth and extra tall canes will encourage new lateral growth and better fall flower production. Continue to remove faded flowers from annuals, roses, and crape myrtles to encourage new growth and more blooms.

Hot, dry weather and spider mites go together. Apply controls before the population builds up. Keep a sharp look out for mites on tomatoes, marigolds, portulaca, junipers,

azaleas and roses. White fly problems can be controlled with readily available insecticides.

Disease problems next year can be greatly reduced by cleaning up the vegetable garden as soon as it is through. The compost pile is an excellent place for this organic matter. Turn the compost pile and keep it moist. Adding a bit of commercial fertilizer from time to time speeds up the decomposition process.

Chrysanthemums need special care now for really nice fall blooms. Feed and keep them moist. Do not pinch them back or prune.

Houseplants may take advantage of warm summer days outdoors provided they remain in shade and never direct sun. they will demand frequent watering; due to their high demand, feeding is extremely important. Overgrown houseplants can be repotted to have them well established prior to overwintering indoors.

Stop by the Henderson County office of the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for further information regarding lawn and garden concerns.

As hot, dry weather continues, fish in Henderson County ponds can run into some real problems. Using a few simple, inexpensive remedies could save pond owners thousands.

An estimated 800,000 small ponds pepper the Texas landscape. East Texas alone has about 300,000 ponds, 80 percent of which have been stocked with fish. Many of these fish are in danger as the hot, dry days cause oxygen levels in ponds to decline.

Ordinarily, aquatic plants, mostly single-celled algae, produce enough oxygen as a by-product of photosynthesis to maintain oxygen levels in ponds. Wind or rain also help to aerate the water.

Hot weather slows down these processes in a number of ways. Warm water holds less oxygen than cool water. Cloudy days slow down photosynthesis, making even less oxygen available to fish. If the pond is too heavily stocked, fish can run into oxygen debt even in cool weather. Hot weather can bring about oxygen debt in moderately stocked ponds.

Oxygen starved fish can be seen gasping at the surface or swimming weakly to the edge of the pond. Oxygen depletion will affect all sizes and species of fish to various degrees but hurts the smallest fish first. Because photosynthesis shuts down during the night, fish showing symptoms of oxygen-depletion will be most obvious during early and mid morning. Pond owners who have a motor equipped boat can easily and cheaply counteract oxygen depletion. Just back the trailer into shallow water and leave the motor running in gear all day. The submerged prop will move enough water about to cause more oxygen to be absorbed by osmosis. If you don't have a trailer, I recommend you lodge the boat against a stump or in deep water against the bank.

What's not effective is just cruising around the pond in the boat. Cruising means the prop is pushing the boat, not the water, resulting in considerably less oxygen absorption.

Hot, dry weather also causes other water quality problems. Pond water evaporates and waste products, primarily nitrites, are not flushed out. Under these conditions some species of fish, most notably catfish, are susceptible to nitrite poisoning.

At first glance, nitrite-poisoning fish look like oxygen depleted fish. They may come to the surface and gasp for air, or sickly swim to the shore. But where oxygen depletion affects the smaller fish of all species first, nitrite poisoning affects catfish first. And where

pond owners will see the worse effects of oxygen depletion in the mornings, fish will exhibit the symptoms of nitrite poisoning throughout the day and night.

There is a simple remedy for nitrite poisoning: common cattle salt. The chloride in salt prevents uptake of nitrites by fish. I recommend using 50 pounds of granular stock salt per acre foot of water, twice a year. An acre-foot equals 43,560 cubic feet or about 326,000 gallons of water.

IMPORTANT DATES:

August 21st - Applications due by 4:30 p.m. to Extension Office for 2015 Master Gardener Class

August 15th - Hunter Education Class - 7:30 a.m. - Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center, Athens - 903-676-2277 for more information and to register

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