

VOICE OF QUALITY

NEWSLETTER - SUMMER - 2019 - 2nd Edition



Owned & Operated by
Jeff & Debra Melmer

A MESSAGE FROM JEFF

Through the months of April, May, and June we had some pretty rough weather. It was hot and dry with very little rain. We thought we would take a little space and speak on our experience, knowledge, and advanced training. The technicians that are the primary driver that visit your property are the most qualified in the industry. We do have to add people as we grow but as a rule the guys you see helping your technician from time to time are in training. Based on their individual experience that can easily exceed a year. Having been in the industry for 33 years, I can assure you that no other company invests that much in training. The average training programs range from 2 to 3 weeks. The state requires 5 days. These other companies have to shove training down the throat of their people because they need them in a truck by themselves treating properties so “the work gets done”. Having been employed at other companies, we can assure you this is the directive, at many other companies in our industry .

Out of our current crew we have several that had been managers or service managers at other companies. We have a graduate Agronomist. We have a couple with Associate degrees in Entomology. We have 4 front line guys that are even state certified operators. This requires rigorous training and testing after carrying an ID card for a minimum of 3 years.

When one of our technicians or managers tells you something you can be sure it is fact. If they don't have an answer they will tell you that as well and then get the answer. I wish we could know everything but that is impossible. Our industry, plant material, and chemicals are constantly changing.

On the other side of things we are often told the irrigation guy, or another company, or the landscaper will tell you something and you believe them. Frankly if any of these related industries had the knowledge, and understanding and licensing to do what we do they likely would be doing it because simply put, it is more profitable. They are telling you what they think or someone told them one time, or what you want to hear.

All we ask is that when one of these individuals brings an issue to your attention we absolutely want to know. When we tell you what the real problem is and it happens to be different then what you have been told please, do not forget the extensive knowledge we are using to give you that answer.

Along these same lines we all had a very bad May and June. We had 25 days in excess of 95 degrees with heat indexes between 105 and 110 degrees. Grass and shrubs dried up and some even died or thinned out extensively. During this period we heard everything from “it is caused by bugs to disease”. As we normally find, the people that made these claims could not tell anyone what bug or disease it was. The bottom line was the best irrigation system in the world cannot hold up under that kind of pressure. Most certainly not at 2 days a week watering. We are aware of people that watered every day during this period. While the damage was limited on those properties they still had some stressed areas. We know how expensive water can be for most of you but when something like what we experienced happens you have 2 choices: water more or let stuff die. The thing that is absolute is no chemical is going to keep soil from drying out or make the soil wet again.

Jeff Melmer

IRRIGATION

There are many questions regarding irrigation. Irrigation frequency? What time is best to water? Should I water in the middle of the day? Won't that burn the grass? Does it evaporate?

We often hear: "we get tons of rain", "it could not be water with all the rain", "my irrigation guy said it is getting plenty of water it must be bugs or disease". These are all legitimate statements, but are they correct? In some cases yes, but how much water is a ton of rain? Your technicians, our office staff, and I communicate as much as we can about monitoring rain fall. A simple rain gauge is all you need so you know exactly how much rain you received at your property. ¼ inch to ½ inch is only good for one day in the summer.

Please understand that we all receive varying amounts of rain on a daily basis. The rain gauge is a valuable tool in understanding water, water needs, and water requirements to sustain a healthy landscape and in many cases saving us money on our water bill.

Irrigation Calibration is an effective tool in understanding why a certain area of our landscape, especially turf, struggle at times. Just by merely turning your irrigation on and watching it, does not mean you are getting good water and irrigation is not the issue. This is a common statement but until you calibrate you can only guess that it is adequate.

A good example of how calibration tells the truth, follows. The whole front lawn was getting coverage by sprinkler heads, but there was a bad spot in the lawn. We put cups throughout that zone, including in the center of the bad spot and the adjacent good spots. We then ran the system for 15 minutes. The area in question was being watered by a head doing a 360 degree turn. It was putting out 75% less water than the rest. The rest of the zone had heads only doing 90 degree and 180 degree turns. To run the system long enough for the head doing a 360 would mean the rest of the zone would be flooded. The proper fix was to change the system so the 360 head was removed and replaced with heads that match the same coverage area as the rest.



RAIN SENSORS

Rain sensors sense moisture and will shut your clock down when functioning properly. Location, Location, Location, is the key to ensuring the sensor functions as intended. We receive directional rainfall frequently. If your sensor is near the clock, lower than an eve, under a tree, hanging upside down, or just old, it should be updated and properly placed. The newer wireless rain sensor sure makes it easy to properly place your rain sensor for optimum performance while not being an eye-sore on the side of the house.

MOSQUITO CONTROL

All the rain and standing water has made the mosquito population explode. I have to say they are about the worst I have seen as far back as I can remember.

We are able to get good control by using a machine that blows the products in a fine mist allowing them to reach the underside of leaf material. This protects a lot of the product from breaking down quickly. The mosquito we deal with is a very weak flyer and must rest about every 6 foot of flight. As they move through the property they rest where we have put products. In general this works really great. However, the weather this summer has been prime for mosquitos and sometimes not so good for us.



I wanted all of you that have our mosquito control program to know if you have an event coming up or just feel you need a retreatment we will be happy to do this at no extra charge beyond your regular program charges. Just give us notice so we have time to get out prior to your event and we will be there for you. Our goal is to make your gatherings a mosquito-less success and we will happily do what is needed to beat the challenges created by the weather conditions.

MOWING ST. AUGUSTINE

This is the time of year that our St. Augustine grass can be put under a great deal of stress. Mowing height is critical for St. Augustine. At this time of year your grass is growing vertically, it is standing straight up. Your mowing height should be adjusted to compensate for this. Most St. Augustine grass should be cut at a minimum of 3-½ inches during most of the year. However, this time of the year through October you should be mowing at 4 to 4-½ inches. This ensures optimal appearance, health and color are maintained. Cutting to short puts a great deal of stress on your turf. It can weaken the plant, bugs sense stress (So do yourself a favor-raise your mowing height, talk to your landscaper and get them to raise their mower.)

With the excessive heat that we have been going through, scalping or cutting the lawn too short likely will result in the loss of turf rapidly. At this time of the year getting the turf to recover from any type of damage is difficult due to the growing season getting shorter.

Shaded St. Augustine benefits from a higher cut all year long so there will be more leaf blades to absorb light needed for photosynthesis, this will also aid in retaining turf density for this time of year.

Zoysia turf performs its best at 1 ½ inches tall. By this time of the year you are likely about that height. 2 to 2 ½ inches is the maximum height Zoysia should be mowed. Any taller begins to present color and appearance issues as the year wears on. Please discuss proper mowing with your landscaper so they continue at this level to insure your Zoysia can look its best for the remainder of the year. Keeping the cut low also reduces what has to be removed in the spring.

Zoysia also seems to be very sensitive to heat stress and can wilt very quickly. This does not require extra water, but does imply the importance of adequate irrigation coverage during our non-rainy periods. We do treat problem areas with nutritional supplements and the areas usually recover in a few days to a week or 2, depending on the severity of dehydration.

If you have an area of grass that is too small for a lawn mower or in an area where you cannot get a mower you are set up for failure. Many times these spots of grass get cut with a weed eater. Try as hard as you can but there is no way to prevent dipping the cutting head and scalping the grass. If there is no grass blade left the plant will thin and then die. If you have to cut an area with a weed eater the best thing you can do is take the grass out and install ground cover or shrubs. If you keep the grass just keep in mind it is going to look bad and likely will fill in with weeds.



DROUGHT DAMAGE

This last May and June we had a vicious drought with around 4 weeks with high temperatures, wind, no humidity, very little dew, and not a drop of rain. We are still seeing turf and shrubs that have not fully recovered. At the time this all happened we hit a point that our soil seemed to dry out overnight and the next day things started dying. We had properties that had nearly perfect irrigation systems and it was just not enough to keep up.

When we have weather like this you as a homeowner have 2 options. Understand that water is the only cure and if there is not enough you will have damage, or use an excess amount of water (break the water restrictions) to keep your turf and shrubs alive. It becomes a matter of deciding will I risk \$1000s if not tens of \$1000s of landscape or will I risk running the irrigation as required to keep my property alive.

SOD WEB WORMS

This time of year we experience a pest called the Sod Web Worm. This insect has a complete life cycle (It goes through the same developmental stages as a butterfly.) You may also notice this time of year we are seeing a lot of butterflies. This is important to understand because in our area all the insects in the moth and butterfly families are pupating this time of year and developing into the adults you see fluttering around your property. All of these insects are very sensitive to heat and sun, moths being the most susceptible. This forces them to gather in shady areas of your lawn during the day. After dusk they fly away and do moth things. With all of this said, only a small number of the dingy brown moths that you see in your lawn are actually sod web worm moths. It also is impossible to eliminate the moths. Sprays will only kill the ones that are there at the time of the spray. As soon as the spray dries, moths from other areas will move in because the environment is favorable. (cool, shady, and moist) Having moths in your shrubs and lawn does not mean there are caterpillars currently damaging the lawn. (no moth or butterfly is capable of causing damage to your lawn or shrubs)



One extremely important thing to understand is there is a chemical that greatly reduces the possibility of damage from the caterpillars. It truly is a preventative treatment for sod web and army worms. The product is systemic and absorbs into the grass' circulatory system. When the Sod Web Worm and Army Worm caterpillars hatch they are extremely small and must feed on the grass. While the level of pesticide is extremely low, the size of the caterpillar makes it extremely easy to kill. We treat every lawn with this product and have done so for 5 seasons now. It works and it last through the lawn damaging caterpillar season! To our knowledge no other company uses this product in our area because it is very expensive. We choose to use it so our customers do not get damage. Like many other extra or special things we do, our main objective is to take care of the customer. If you have ever replaced grass because it was mowed down and did not recover from Sod Web Worms you know exactly why this is so important. Nothing we do can stop a flying moth from getting where it wants to be. So you will see moths. But it is very unlikely that you will ever see damage from the caterpillars when we are servicing your property.



As you know this has been an extremely wet year. The rains just kept coming and the turf grew very fast. The abnormal weather has allowed us to see how well our treatments have been working. In past years we would seldom have retreatments for Sod Web Worms. The product absorbed into the plants system and stayed at a control level for the whole season. We found that this year it has not worked as well. We believe the grass just grew so fast that the product moved through the plants system too quickly.

We are seeing activity in many properties. It is being addressed and after treatment the turf will recover. We constantly find ways to make our service as proactive as possible so you seldom have to experience issues like this. However, we are often fighting against Mother Nature and you know how hard that can be.

JEFF IS ON HIS SOAP BOX

We completely understand how frustrating it is to have issues. It happens to all of us. For most customers we are on your property 1 time a month. A lot can happen during those 29 days we are not there. We welcome the calls when you feel you have an issue. We can only ask that when you have an issue you make us aware and we will get on it immediately and do all we can to resolve your issue. But when we tell you something you don't want to hear we also hope you will not take it out on our office staff. They do not know much about agronomics. They do the "office stuff". We just want to remind you that taking out your frustrations on the office really does not accomplish a thing. They certainly are not the ones that created your issue, they will have nothing to do with fixing your issue, and most importantly they are nice people that really do care and will make sure your information gets to someone that can address your issue. If you really need to unload on someone, I am that person. We can always set a meeting and work everything out.

SHRUB CARE

There are always challenges when it comes to shrubs. They do tolerate a lot more stress than what our turf does. The rainy season can wreak havoc as too much water is not always a good thing. Some plants prefer wet soil, some prefer dry conditions. Matching the plants to the moisture conditions will lead to less maintenance and a healthier landscape.

We get a lot of questions on trimming shrubs. How much to cut, when is the right time and how to cut different plants? A lot is dependent on the shrub. This time of year with the issues of heat, major pruning can be very stressful and minor pruning can even cause problems for some plants. By this time of year any major pruning should be completed. We do not have that much growing season left for plants to fully recover. Good results from pruning are very dependent on the time of year. If you must do pruning this time of year, get it done as soon as possible and consult with us if in need of advice.

On the other hand many plants do need minor pruning, so that they are not so overgrown by late fall. Some plants that will perform better later this fall if trimmed this time of year in no particular order, Snow plant, Knock Out roses, Hawthorne, Trinetts, Crotons, Plumbago, Pinwheel Jasmine, Dwarf Azaleas, Poinsettia and Hydrangeas are just a few that can receive minor trimming. Even your Crepe Myrtle could use a little clean up to keep blooms going well into September. The following plants should not receive much if any pruning at this time of year; Formosa Azaleas, Viburnum, Ligustrum, and Jasmines.



ST AUGUSTINE GRASS IN SUMMER HEAT

You likely noticed that your St Augustine lawn started to thin out a little as we went through summer when the rains finally came in May. This can be seen very easily in shaded areas. We wanted to share with you what is happening.

Plants can only take in light to produce sugars and starches through the leaf blade. If you follow the St Augustine leaf blade down you will find the crown or sheath that is at the base of the blades and connects to the runner. The runners and sheath do a very poor job of converting sunlight to energy. When the heat and humidity skyrockets St Augustine sheaths begin to grow more straight up while the rest of the year they grow closer to the soil. When the sheath is sticking straight up this

alone makes the grass look thinner. If you mow and remove too much of the blade this slows the plants ability to produce energy to the point that it begins to thin out. This is why it is even more noticeable in the shade where lack of sunlight is already an issue. All of this is a natural process the plant goes through as it grows and nothing can be done to stop it. As the heat and humidity begin to drop the sheath will lay back down and the lawn will thicken back up.

The only thing that can be done to improve this situation is to make sure your mowing height is raised to 4 to 4 ½ inches so there is more blade left after mowing to produce energy. Also do all you can to not miss a mowing. This can be difficult with all the rains but things will be worse if the lawn grows too tall.





Quality First Lawn & Shrub Care, Inc.
PO Box 720475
Orlando, FL 32872

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TIME TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL, THANK GOODNESS!

When you are out buying all those new school clothes a good tip to make sure they are pest free, is to wash and dry or at least run the clothes through the dryer on high heat for about 10 minutes. Bed bugs, bed bug eggs, clothes moths, and most all other pests that might hitch-hike on the new clothing can be destroyed with about 10 minutes at 125 degree heat greatly reducing the possibility of an infestation in your home.



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