



"We Care"

Owned & Operated by Jeff & Debra Melmer

# VOICE OF QUALITY

## MESSAGE FROM

*Jeff*

NEWSLETTER - SPRING 2020

It is hard to believe it is March already. Winter, if you prefer to call it that, was very different this year. We went on an incredible roller coaster of weather. Patterns of unseasonable warm weather to normal and below normal temperatures. Let's not forget the extended period of rainfall in December. The week around Christmas was a rare event for our area. We had 13 days of measurable rainfall. An unseasonable wet December only has occurred in 1905 when we had 18 days of rain, and in 1914, 1976, and 1997 we had 15 days of rain. This gives you a good idea of our ever-changing weather patterns and what I believe is cyclical weather patterns throughout time. The point I am making is how challenging the success of our service through the seasons is, with our very inconsistent weather.

January was probably our most normal month and a lot of our issues settled in or came to our attention. In February we became unseasonable warm, also setting heat records for the month. These temperatures began to waken a lot of our plants. Many of our trees and shrubs have begun to flush new growth and seemingly spring is here or is it? If you recall last February, we went through the same ordeal with the temperatures, then

March hit and we actually remained at normal to below normal temperatures for most of the month. This wreaked havoc on our Zoysia cut downs. Many of us started cut downs in late February and early March. When the temperatures did not warm up to 70 degree overnight our Zoysia did not respond and regrowth took well over a month. With this in mind we are encouraging our customers and landscapers to hold off doing cut downs until at least March 15th. This ideally will put us in a better position to get our Zoysia cut downs completed and regrowth within 2 to 3 weeks.

If you are unsure of your need for a cut down please contact our office. Your technician is aware of your needs and we can communicate appropriately. There is an insert in this newsletter that can be a guide in your cut down or buzzcut please review and again if any questions contact our office. (We also recommend sharing the letter with your landscaper) This edition also covers the cut backs for your ornamental shrubs. There is an awful lot covered in our newsletter and spring is the best season to do major pruning.

## QualityFirstCares.com

I would like to take this opportunity to make you aware of the many tools our newsletter offers. We always try to bring content and pertinent information to educate and inform on the many issues and misinformation that goes on in our industry. The information we provide you is based on science and agricultural information provided by our fine Florida Universities. You can always trust that we have researched issues and completely understand the "how's and why's" before we share that information with you. We have all our past newsletters on our website (QualityFirstCares.com) We feel you likely would enjoy reviewing past newsletters, such as last year we covered the many types of mulch that are available to be utilized. In almost every newsletter we cover

irrigation concerning run frequencies and zone run times for the season. This information fluctuates from year to year and season to season based on the weather conditions at that time. We also have numerous articles on proper mowing for St Augustine and Zoysia. Proper trimming of ornamental shrubs, how damaging weekly trimming can be, and how unsightly Ligustrum trees become when constant trimming prevents them from growing. You will find many other articles such as "The Perfect Landscape", "Managing your Landscaper", "The Crucial Element of Watering", the list goes on. Many of the articles are important and timeless information, so again please take some time to review and as always if you have questions please contact our office.

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## SPRING TRIMMING

This is the best time of year to cut back our shrubs so please review the plant listing and cut back procedures outlined in this article.

In this edition we will try to cover all plants that should or need to be cut back; plants that may need some extra trimming or plants that may not need any extra work at all. As a rule you should not cut more than 1/3 of the plant, but if needed, cut as far back as you feel necessary.

Spring is the best season to accomplish all your extra yard work. Its cooler, the heat and the humidity are not present to stress out your plants. Spring is the time of year we get our best flush of new growth and your plants will regrow quickly. In some instances it gives us a whole growing season for plants to recover to desired levels.

We will try to list plants that require or are in need of an annual cut back. **Plants that need cutting back annually...in no particular order:**

Fire Cracker Plant	Plumbago	Jatropha	Oleanders
Pinwheel Jasmine	Dwarf Liriope	Ruellia	Flax Lily
Cordyline (Hawaiian Ti Plants)		Australian Fire Bush	

**Plants that may need to be cut back due to being overgrown for their location or they just look messy or unkempt...again, in no particular order:**

Coontie Ferns	Cardboard Palms	Liriope	Hollies
Hibiscus	Nandina	Snow Plants	Ixora
Criminum Lilies	Crotons	Camelias	Eugenias
Duranta	Boxwoods	Mondo Grass	Loropetalum
Trinetts	Sago Palms	Loropetalum	
Large Leaf Philodendrons	Shell Ginger (other Ginger varieties as well)		

**Ground Covers:** Jasmine

**Plants that may need to be cut back...once the blooming cycle is over:**

Gardenias	Knock Out Roses	Drift Roses	Formosa Azaleas
Angel Wing Jasmine	Downey Jasmine	Indian Hawthorne	Camelias

If you have larger plants that require cut down, such as Ligustrum Trees, Large Viburnum Hedges, Podocarpus, Larger Hollies (such as Nellie Stevens), Marynell, Oak Leaf, Luster Leaf Holly, Eggleston Holly or larger Camelias, it is the time of year



to get this done. The aggressive trimming now will reduce the trimming needed through the year. When they are cut back now you will be able to do more selective trimming with hand shears. This will reduce the stress created by constant shearing, it will reduce excessive shoot growth and will improve overall health vigor and appearance of these specimen plants. This will reduce maintenance time, your landscaper's time or the time you spend laboring in your garden. Large hedges often get thin at the bottom. This usually is a result of the top shading the bottom. Cutting so the plant is about 25% more narrow at the top will usually help fill the bottom back in. Aggressive trimming now will only leave the plant looking bad for a few weeks and the reward will last the rest of the year.

Juniper is a plant that does not like a lot of trimming; be selective and try to avoid shearing if a Juniper has grown too large. You can try trimming, but you may have to pull it out and start over.

### Palm Trimming



**Before pruning**

Trimming may be difficult depending how much cold weather we get over winter. If it is brown, cut it off! If there is any green in the palm frond it is best to leave it as long as you can. The green tissue is critical for the palm to create photosynthesis from sunlight resulting in energy to feed the plant until new growth emerges. You may find the first new growth produced has some browning, mainly streaks and or spotting. This is natural and a result of the cold injury. The damage done to the more tropical palms from the cold could put them in a very stressful situation.



**Proper pruning**



**Over-pruned**

Palms that may be damaged the most by cold weather are Foxtail, Royal, Bottle Palm, Areca, and Banana Adonai (Christmas Palm).

and it is in the soil so replacing with another palm in the same area is not recommended however there is a process that if followed carefully you will have a better chance of the new tree surviving.

Sort of a buyer beware situation.



**Foxtail Palm Tree**

## LANDSCAPE PALMS

Tropical palms are becoming more prevalent in our landscape. Although it is still what we consider risky business certain regions are seeing long term success. With disease always being a concern, certain palms are having issues. The Queen Palm is susceptible to Ganoderma and Fusarium Wilt. Neither disease is controllable or preventable. The Foxtail palm is an excellent choice or substitute as it is resistant to Fusarium Wilt (at this time). The Royal

Palm is also a suitable replacement, just understand it primarily needs room to grow at its base. Both of these palms are tropical, with one good freeze of 20 degrees for a few hours could result in the plants dying or at the very least being damaged to the point that it could take a few years to recover. The more established the plants are the better they will handle a freeze.

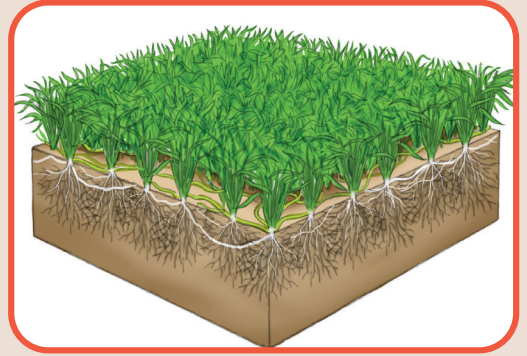
All the above palms are susceptible to Ganoderma. This is a terminal disease

## **ZOYSIA TURF**

### **ZOYSIA GRASS CUT DOWN**

As you read through the “cut down” or “buzz cut” it should be a little easier process. Please review all the processes and always feel free to call if you have any questions regarding your Zoysia cut down.

Every spring we discuss cutting our Zoysia by doing a “Cut Down” or “Buzz Cut”. A cut down is the process of cutting the grass extremely low. You will remove most all that is green and some of the decaying material from last year’s growth and the natural winter decline. In the past years we have worked to fine tune our service programs to avoid this labor intensive and messy project. Most lawns will only need what is called a buzz cut. This is a tight cut with a goal of 1 to 1.5 inches. The primary reason for this is to reduce thatch buildup. Reducing the thatch build up will also aid in insect control as a primary



**Zoysia**

pest of Zoysia is the Tuttle Mealy Bug. This bug finds harborage in the thatch and can be difficult to control in its hiding place. This also shortens the grass to allow for a seasonal growth spurt that will affect the appearance of the lawn all year. When you cut Zoysia this close, the lawn will be mostly brown. It will look like the lawn will die. You are truly scalping the lawn on purpose. Because it will look so bad and many landscapers just do not understand it is a critical part of caring for Zoysia we have found it extremely difficult to get them to cut the way it should be done. Assure them you know they will cut all the green away leaving very little behind except runners. It will recover in a few weeks and if the lawn had not been mowed at the correct height in the past this is the only time of year and way to get rid of that “Shaggy” look. Just like a bad haircut it will grow back. Do not assume your landscaper knows this needs to be done. Many simply do not understand how important this is. If it does not get done in the spring the look of your lawn will suffer. Many of you will not be required to do a cut down or buzz cut but for those that do we have some changes in your watering program that should help to expedite the “grow in” of your Zoysia.

For those lawns that need a buzz cut or a complete cut down watering after the process should be done as though the lawn was a new install. Water every day for 10 minutes per zone. Practice this for 7 to 10 days or until you see green grass beginning to grow again. Then reduce the watering to your normal frequency. The cut down is extremely stressful and keeping the stems and runners moist during the recovery is critical. We have found in this situation a daily short watering is the best way to ward off additional damage.

This extra watering may generate more weed growth but we will work diligently to correct this as soon as the turf is strong enough to handle herbicides.

Temperatures will also play a key role in how quickly the lawn recovers. Zoysia grows extremely slow in cool weather. We recommend waiting to do your cut down or buzz cut until the overnight temperatures are averaging 70 degrees. The forecast is that March temperatures will be about average to slightly above average. We strongly recommend holding cut downs until the 15th of March at the earliest. If you recall last February it warmed up and the grass began to green up. Many people started doing cut downs and then we had cooler weather and even hard freezes that prevented Zoysia from greening back up until mid May.

When doing a cut down or a buzz cut we do recommend that you bag the grass that is removed. There will be a lot of material removed and leaving it on the ground will smother the grass resulting in excessive damage.

March is when we do the granular spring feeding. We would prefer to fertilize after the cut down or buzz cut is completed.

We will do our best to communicate with all our Zoysia customers prior to doing your granular fertilization application. If you have any questions or concerns please call our office or if you rather we can schedule a consultation.

We did hand out a Zoysia cut down letter when we did your February service. The same letter has been added as an insert to this newsletter to aid in communicating with your landscaper. Please call if you need assistance.

### **St Augustine Turf**

With the exception of some fungus and a few weeds our St. Augustine had a good winter. There was very little cool weather damage to most properties and with the spring granular fertilization we should see the grass take off and be what is expected. Good green color, good density, and minimal weed issues.



# ST. AUGUSTINE VS. ZOYSIA

## St Augustine Pros & Cons

Has been the #1 turf used in Florida for years.

Needs chemical care but regular maintenance will keep it healthy

Mowed at 3.5 to 4.5 inches all year long

In general mowing can be done with large mowers

Everyone has experience caring for this turf

Runners will often fill in areas that receive minor damage from weather, pest, and traffic

A shade variety does reasonably well in areas that get moderate sunlight

Large areas of damage must be repaired or plugged

Has very low tolerance to drought

It is very slow to recover from drought damage

Irrigation must be in very good shape during high stress seasons

Several weed types cannot be controlled with chemicals due to no product available

Handles cold weather pretty well

Course texture does not feel nice when walking or playing on

Extremely low tolerance to traffic

Seville St. Augustine will do OK in shade

## Zoysia Pros & Cons

While newer to Florida it has a long track record in other states

Needs chemical care but regular maintenance will keep it healthy

It is critical to understand nutritional needs to prevent over fertilization

Must be mowed down to 1 inch or less in the spring

Landscaper must raise mower through the growing season in increments

To look its best it should never be allowed to grow over 2 inches tall

Needs to be mowed with smaller mowers due to tight cut and potential scalping

People are still learning how to best care for Zoysia

Has extremely high drought tolerance. It still requires water, to keep it looking good it needs as much water as St Augustine, BUT it does get dry, even bone dry, it will recover in a few weeks. This is what is meant when they say it is "drought tolerant".

Only has 1 weed that cannot be controlled with chemicals, Wild Bermuda

At some point in late fall / winter it will thin and start browning due to not being able to grow as the soil and air cools. This is completely dependent on when and how cool the weather gets.

When properly cared for it will look and feel like carpet 8 to 10 months of the year

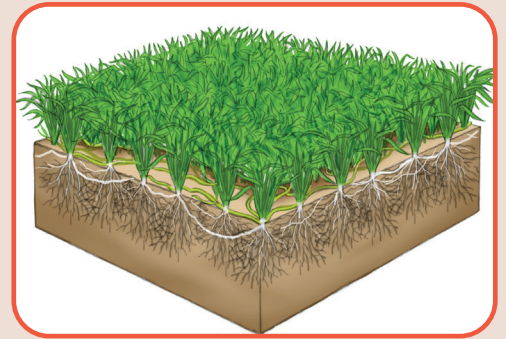
Has one of the best traffic tolerance levels of the turf varieties available in Florida

Does not grow well in shade

If you are installing a new yard there are many things to consider. We are always here to offer advice or just to make sure you know all your options. The one thing we always recommend is the irrigation must be 100% perfect before you start. If you have coverage or volume issues the beautiful new lawn you are installing will be dead again when we get our first drought



**St. Augustine**



**Zoysia**





## ZOYSIA GRASS CARE

Planning for a late March early April cut down

Every spring we must cut down our Zoysia grass. This process is one of the most critical components to having a beautiful Zoysia lawn. By doing this the excess thatch from the previous year is removed. Not only will your lawn look better it will be much healthier. Yet this has been a constant battle to get landscapers on board, to do.

Most times they know how bad a cut down is going to make the lawn look and they are worried you will be upset or the process will kill the lawn. We thought this year we would provide you a letter that you can give to your landscaper, so they can plan for the spring cut down.

Landscapers,

If you have ever installed Zoysia, you know how tight it is cut directly from the grower. This is not something they do prior to the harvest. It is how they mow it all year long. The following information we are providing is how Zoysia must be cared for.

- We should never allow Zoysia grass to get over 2 inches tall. To keep it this short at the end of the year you **MUST** start the beginning of the year low. You should start the year at a maximum of 1 inch. This can only be done by measuring the distance from the concrete up to the blade cutting edge. You might take note of the mower setting so you know what setting matches the 1 inch height on your Zoysia mower. This is known as a buzz cut.
- If the lawn was allowed to grow over 2 inches the best thing to do is to cut it to the ground. This will allow it to grow all new foliage and structure. This is known as a cut down.
- When you do the cut down or buzz cut this customer knows the lawn will look horrible. It will be brown and scalped. They also know with our care in 2 or 3 weeks it will begin looking fantastic again and will stay that way all season long.
- The cut down or buzz cut will leave behind a lot of dead grass and runners. Most companies rake and bag the debris. If the lawn was allowed to grow real tall you might even have to cut it twice, first a little higher and then second down to 1 inch. However you get it done, the lawn needs mowed down to 1 inch or less.
- After you do the cut down you will keep mowing at 1 inch. It could be May or maybe even in June before you raise the mower. Just do not raise the mower until you start to see lite scalping from a fresh mow. You may do this 2 or 3 more times as the summer passes but avoid allowing the lawn to be over 2 inches at the end of the growing season. Combining your cut with our chemical knowledge will make our customer happy and result in both of us showing what true professionals we are.

You are welcome to contact our office directly if you have any questions.

You can also go to [QualityFirstCares.com](http://QualityFirstCares.com) In the "Newsletter" section look at Spring 2020 for more detailed information

## OUR UPDATED WEBSITE

We have an updated web site.

We hope you will take a minute and visit our rebuilt web site.

**[www.QualityFirstCares.com](http://www.QualityFirstCares.com)**

If you are installing new plants or turf this spring see "recommendations" on our home page, "Irrigating New Sod and Shrubs" to get the most success from your installation.

## ST. AUGUSTINE GRASS VARIETIES

All St Augustine varieties are hybrids. They are germinated in a laboratory. They are sterile meaning the seeds produced will not germinate. It takes years to get a crop. Once established the grower will cut the product to be sold, but always leaves a strip of grass between the cuts that will grow back together so it can be harvested again, and again, and again.... Once a grower has committed to a variety they have to stick with it until they are able to grow enough of a new variety to market it. The last few years some new varieties of St Augustine have come to market. They tout benefits such as shade tolerance, bug resistance, disease resistance, better color and more. Having been in the industry for over 30 years we have seen many new types of St Augustine come to market that have failed. Like many new products, you never really know how it will perform out of the controlled testing environment until a couple of years pass. A good example of this is Palmetto St Augustine. This variety was propagated at Texas A&M. It was developed to have higher drought tolerance. It was designed for the Texas climate which is much dryer than our Florida climate. Years back when we had several years of drought in a row this variety was brought to Florida. It does look fantastic in drought conditions. But in a rainy year it gets Pythium Root Rot and falls apart. Yellowing, thinning, and even dying. The growers had committed to Palmetto and there is a massive inventory. So, it continues to be sold. Based on our experience, knowledge, and at this moment in time we make the following recommendation should you consider sodding or repairing areas with St Augustine grass.

*In shady areas use Seville*

*In direct sunlight use Floritam*

These are tried and proven varieties of St Augustine grass that will give you the best results. The other new varieties may work fantastic and after a few years we will know for sure, but we recommend letting someone else be the test subject.

## BROWN PATCH FUNGUS / LARGE PATCH

This has been an odd winter. In November and December we had higher than normal temperatures. In December we also had higher than normal rainfall. The lack of a frost allowed turf to stay greener and grow longer than it normally would at this time of year. The perfect storm of weather conditions led to an outbreak of Brown Patch Fungus.

Brown Patch Fungus or fungi is always present. It is extremely valuable along with other micro-organisms in decaying organic material back into soil. A simple way to understand the fungi is to think of a mushroom. When weather conditions get just right they pop up, ripen, and then produce spores that float off to lay in wait for the next time the weather is right. If you have ever kicked a mushroom you have seen the spores float up in a cloud that looks like smoke or dust. Brown Patch Fungus functions very similar



to this but on a microscopic level. All through the year these spores attach to organic material and feed on it adding to the decaying process. In warm humid weather the spores become so abundant they begin feeding on healthy organic material, your lawn. In the right weather conditions the fungus grows very fast allowing more spores to float in the air spreading the disease quickly. There are 2 ways to treat Brown Patch. 1. Using a topical product that coats the foliage of the plant so the spores cannot attach and grow. The problem with this method is water be it rain or irrigation washes the chemical into the soil where it no longer works. 2. Use of a systemic fungicide that absorbs into the plant and protects it from fungus. This type product will last for a few weeks no matter what the weather conditions. While systemic products are very costly to use, they are what we use to give our customers the best possible solution. The unfortunate issue is that we never know where or when the fungus will show up making preventative treatments almost impossible to time and cost prohibitive.

If you did have a Brown Patch Fungus issue in your turf, the only good news is that it does not kill the turf. As soon as we get into warmer weather the turf will grow out of the superficial damage to look fantastic again. In March we are applying your spring fertilizer that should speed up this recovery process.

## TIME CHANGE

Sunday March 8th is the day your clocks will "spring ahead". This is also the time when most areas will be allowed to start adding additional water on your plants and turf. Be sure to allow the weather conditions to dictate as to the need for increased watering. March and April can be rainy months so it is best to determine the need of watering by watching the plants. If they are showing signs of wilt extra water will be needed.



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**MARCH 8th, 2020**  
**DAYLIGHT SAVINGS TIME**  
**Time To Resume**  
**Twice - A - Week Watering**

**We Care**  
**407-737-1889**

**EMAIL THE EDITOR** - Do you have a question or comment you would like addressed in an upcoming newsletter? Send them to [lynn@qualityfirstcares.com](mailto:lynn@qualityfirstcares.com)

R/O MPS 407-657-7414 QF-NL01 02/20

**TERMITES!**

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**TERMITE SEASON IS HERE**

Why do they call it Termite Season?

Termites are always threatening your home. Be it Drywood or Subterranean they are around all year. Our industry calls it termite season because for many the only or first sign that you have termites in your home, is when they swarm. Over winter the queen of a termite colony and even many species of ants, produce what are called secondary reproductives. These are insects that have wings and will fly away from the colony to start a new colony. They are new Kings and Queens. Depending on the size of the original colony and the success rate of the insect being able to start a new colony impacts the number of swarmer's that are generated over the winter. It could be 100's and even 1000's. During this time the swarmer's are fed and nurtured by the workers. When weather conditions get right the queen sends a message telling all the workers to push out the swarmer's. The result is a bunch of dead

bugs in your home. You now know for sure that you have some species of termite or ant that has made your home, theirs.

As a general rule;

- Ants swarm between February and July
- Subterranean termite from February through April
- Drywood Termites from May through July

Should you have an insect swarm in your home save a few samples in a zip lock and vacuum up the rest. Make note of where you found them. Then call your termite company and make sure they identify the pest you have and that they provide a proper solution. Ignoring a swarm will just cost you more in repairs when the damage gets extensive.

Home Owners insurance does not cover damage caused by termites and we are in a very high risk area with over 30% of the grand total spent each year dealing with termites in all the continental states combined, being spent in Florida.

