

Ask The Plant Groom(tm) by Dale Groom, The Plant Groom(tm)

QA1109

Hello Dale,

I was told if I cut my St. Augustine grass real low while it is still cool for spring time it would help get rid of the dead grass and will start a fresh new growth is this true or will it hurt my lawn? - L. A.

This sometimes used practice on Texas lawns is called scalping. It is a nasty job that does not need to be preformed.

Dead grass leaves and other plant parts actually add small amounts of organic matter back to the soil which is a positive action. The practice of scalping St. Augustine lawns is not one that I recommend. However, it is your lawn and do it if you wish.

If you do proceed with scalping your St. Augustine lawn make double sure you are not cutting off all the stolons or above the ground runners. If this occurs your lawn will most likely not recover from the action. While Bermuda grass has below the ground stems called rhizomes and usually recovers well if cut to ground level, St. Augustine only has above the ground runners or stolons.

If you haven't had your lawn's soil analyzed in the past two years I do recommend getting it done ... NOW. All county offices of Texas Cooperative Extension commonly called the County Agent's Office in TX they have soil sample containers and instruction sheets you may pick up free.

If you or anyone else reading my column wish, we will send a set of two bags and instruction sheet free with a request and an enclosed long envelope self addressed with two 1st class stamps on it. Mail your request to; Soil Test Kit, 10056 Marsh Lane, Suite B-101, Dallas, TX 75229.

We have shrubs that are about 20 years old that are in the front of our house and four huge shrubs on the 4 corners. Several have died over the past two summers with the drought. We have pulled them up, we were planning on replacing these shrubs with the same ones. Now we have decided to pull up the rest of the shrubs and replace with new ones.

My questions are:

What is the best way to pull them out?

How do we kill the roots to the old shrubs(as you know they are very well establish)?

When is the best time to replant shrubs?

Thank you. - P. S.

The best "device" to remove large wood shrubs is a 3/4 to 1 ton four wheel drive pick up and heavy chain.

Roots may be hand dug using a tree spade. I have an all steel one with a flat blade approximately 6" wide. By keeping this edge sharp with a file and using its' strong structure most roots are easily cut and removed. Most shrub roots should be in the top 12 inches of soil.

Research has shown the very best time of year to install hardy landscape plantings including shrubs is in the fall. The second best is now ... early spring. I do not recommend attempting to establish new planting in our blast furnace heat of July and August. Oct. and Nov. are usually ideal months for new landscape plantings in TX.

While you are in the process of remodeling your landscape bed let me suggest employing the EARTH-KIND(tm) method. If your soil is clay add 3 inches of plant derived finished compost and 3 inches of expanded shale to the bed. Add one inch of each material per pass with a rear tined tiller as deep as the tiller will till. When all the materials are blended into your soil crown the bed 6 inches in the center and slope to the edges. After your plants are installed water thoroughly, install drip irrigation and mulch the entire bed 3 - 4 inches deep with shredded tree trimmings, shredded bark or other organic mulch. DO NOT use inorganic mulches such as gravel, ground tires or similar materials.

On an annual basis add 1 - 2 inches or what ever amount is needed to maintain the mulch 3 - 4 inches deep. Set up and maintained properly EARTH-KIND(tm) landscape managed beds will save water use by as much as 70% and no fertilizer of any kind is ever needed.

In sandy soils add 6 inches of compost, no expanded shale is needed but do follow remaining EARTH-KIND(tm) recommendations previously outlined.

Good luck on your project.

Dale Groom, Extension Horticulturist, Texas Cooperative Extension-Dallas County, Texas A & M University System, Native Texan, Columnist, Author, Radio/TV Host is also know state wide as The Plant Groom(tm). PODCAST, ITUNES and RSS Feed of Dale's radio show are all available at ktbb.com You may send your horticultural related questions including lawns, gardens and landscapes to Dale at dalegroom@mycvc.net

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