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### [If properly mowed, lawn clippings can fertilize Bermuda](#)

07/28/2005

Q: I have Bermuda grass. Is it better to bag clippings, or should I leave them on the lawn to decompose?

— Edita

A: Bermuda grass should be mowed at the recommended height of 1/2 to 1 1/2 inches for the hybrids, about 1 inch for the improved seeded types and 1 to 2 for common. The grass should be cut often enough to remove no more than one-third of the leaf height. If fertilized as recommended, Bermuda grass will require mowing every three to five days during the summer.

If lawns are properly fertilized and mowed, grass clippings will not promote thatch accumulation. In fact, returning the clippings to the soil will recycle nutrients and may reduce fertilizer needs by 30 percent. The plant parts most responsible for the accumulation of thatch are the plant stems, runners and roots. These plant parts take longer to decompose.

Q: I have two peach trees that are about 6 to 7 years old. They have been bearing fruit for about three years. I do not have a green thumb, and I have not done anything to the trees (fertilize, pesticide, etc.) Every time the fruit starts to grow, they get spots on them, shrivel up and dry out. Could someone give me step-by-step directions on how to take care of the trees and fruit?

— Paul Ziegler

A: It sounds like the dreaded brown rot fungus. The rot begins as a small brown spot that expands rapidly, developing a brown color and a more or less firm texture. The fruit becomes more susceptible as it matures. Brown rot is especially severe during wet periods. Infected blossoms, twigs and fruit soon become covered with gray-brown tufts of spores.

The brown rot fungus overwinters on mummified fruit on the ground or tree and in infected twigs. Start spraying the tree with Home Orchard Spray according to labeled directions at bud break (when the pink starts to show in the buds). These chemicals include insecticides and fungicides to control insects and diseases. There are many, many problems to which peaches are prone, so spraying is a necessity.

Q: Over the past few weeks we have had a few (three to four) small brown scorpions show up in our house. Our house is on a crawl space. We have two small children, ages 4 and 9 months.

My first question is, what would be driving them into the house? (i.e., do they feed on anything in particular, which may be telling of a larger problem, such as termites? Or is this probably just coincidence?) How "bad" is the venom in case one of my kids were to get stung? Also, what would be the remedy? Ice, vinegar?

Finally, is there anything I can do to prevent them from coming into the house?

— Robert

A: At least two species of scorpion are native to Georgia: the Southern devil (*Vejovis carolinianus*) and striped (*Centruroides vittatus*) scorpions. The former can grow to 1 1/2 inches long, while the latter can get a bit bigger.

Avoiding stings is the best protection. Remove all debris and vegetation that are directly adjacent to a home's foundation. Wear gloves when moving rocks or boards around the yard. Avoid putting your hands where your eyes can't see. And be sure to wear shoes when walking outside at night.

Some nonchemical tactics for long-term outdoor control include:

- Move trash and debris.
- Store firewood and lumber off the ground.
- Remove unnecessary rocks, bricks and blocks.

- Install a barrier strip of gravel around the foundation of the house.
- Keep vegetation trimmed around the foundation of the house.
- Seal any openings or crevices in outside walls.
- Screen and weatherstrip doors, windows and vents.
- Repair leaky air conditioners and other outdoor water sources.

Q: My problem is not with my lawn or garden, but with a house pest. I have woodpeckers pecking holes in the siding on my house, and I can't figure out how to stop them. I have repaired the holes for the third time in less than a year. My house has painted masonite siding on it. It must be something they like. Do you have any ideas on how to stop them? They are a small black-and-white-variety woodpecker. I would appreciate your advice.

— Name withheld

A: Woodpeckers are hard to stop. They are protected, so you can't shoot them, and they fly, so you can't reach them. The best way to keep woodpeckers from hammering on your house is to begin damage control as soon as you hear the first tap. And you should continue these measures even after the woodpecker has left to ensure that it does not return. Any holes the bird has made in your house should be immediately repaired and painted to avoid attracting more woodpeckers.

The following is a list of general woodpecker deterrents.

#### Tactile deterrents

Although some people recommend applying sticky repellents, such as Tanglefoot Pest Control, Roost-No-More and Bird Stop to areas where damage is occurring, we are against using them. These products can get on a bird's plumage, impairing its ability to fly and stay warm. Moreover, they can darken and stain wood siding and cause dirt to adhere to the surface where they're applied.

#### Visual deterrents

Aluminum foil strips or reflective tape, such as Irri-Tape, manufactured by Bird-X, hung from areas where damage occurs may scare away woodpeckers. The strips should be long enough to hang freely and blow in the breeze.

Windssocks hung from house corners serve the same purpose as aluminum foil and may be less intrusive.

Handheld windmills, especially those with reflective vanes, can be attached along areas of damage. The motion of the revolving vanes may discourage woodpeckers. Plastic owls hung from the eaves of a house will generally frighten off woodpeckers for the first few days. However, birds often acclimate to the same visual stimulus in the same exact place every single day. Terror Eyes, manufactured by Bird-X, may prove effective as an alternative to plastic owls. This product bounces from a spring, and the lenticular, holographic eyes follow the bird in any direction. Therefore, the product is moving, making it less likely that the birds will become acclimated to it.

#### Sound deterrents

With an electronic distress call system, a recording of a woodpecker distress call followed by the call of a predator, such as a sharp-shinned hawk, is broadcast through a speaker system at various intervals to frighten woodpeckers away from your house. One example is BirdXPeller Pro, manufactured by Bird-X.

A movement detector that makes noise when it senses movement can be attached to damaged areas.

#### Other preventative measures:

To prevent damage under eaves, lightweight nylon or plastic netting can be attached from the overhanging eaves to the siding of the damaged building. One type of netting on the market is BirdNet, manufactured by Bird-X. To keep the birds from reaching through the net, leave at least 3 inches between the net and the siding.

Aluminum flashing can be used to cover existing holes or to line the corner or fascia boards of the house. You can paint it to match your siding.

Setting up a suet feeder in your yard may draw the birds away from your house. Keep the feeder supplied with food throughout fall, winter, and spring when natural food is scarce and the birds are hungriest because of the cold weather. Remove the feeder during the hot summer months because the suet may become sticky and adhere to the

bird's plumage.

To dull the sound produced by drumming, place padding behind the area where the bird is drumming.

Stephen D. Pettis is an agriculture and natural resources agent with the Gwinnett County Extension Service. He can be reached at 678-377-4010 or [Steve.Pettis@gwinnettcountry.com](mailto:Steve.Pettis@gwinnettcountry.com).

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