VEGETATION MANAGEMENT

By Roger Funk, Ph.D., Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio

Q. *On lawns with a pH of over 8.0, what is the best way to bring down the pH of a satisfactory level?*

A. The standard recommendation for lowering the pH of soil solution is applications of elemental sulfur or sulfur-containing compounds such as iron sulfate and aluminum sulfate. Applications of sulfur to established turf are best limited to five pounds of sulfur per 1000 square feet per application during the dormant season to minimize the potential for "burn."

Although we have successfully corrected alkaline conditions in sandy soils, fine textured soils that are inherently calcareous may resist acidifying treatments because of their tremendous buffering capacity. It is often more feasible to modify the fertilizer treatments to compensate for alkaline-induced deficiencies rather than to attempt to correct the pH.

Q. *I have been told that I can scalp turf in the spring to help eliminate thatch, but I thought that scalping injures the grass.*

A. Turfgrasses can be scalped in early spring before greenup since most of the existing leaf tissue will be replaced with new spring growth. However, after growth has occurred, scalping will upset the equilibrium between the root and shoot systems and cause a stress condition. Also, as the temperature gets warmer, scalping can expose the turfgrass crown to excess heat and drying, which could seriously injure or kill the turfgrass plants.

Q. *Is it true that liquid fertilizers are absorbed by turfgrass leaves and do not promote root growth?*

A. Some of the liquid fertilizers will be absorbed by turfgrass leaves, but it is not true that liquid fertilizers promote foliage growth without a supporting root system. In fact, granular fertilizers must dissolve in soil solution to form the same nutrient ions that are in liquid fertilizers before the plant root can absorb them. The major difference between a liquid and a granular fertilizer is the rate at which these nutrient ions are released and, therefore, available for root absorption.

Q. *Last year many of the lawns we serviced had snow mold and it left bare spots. If the same thing happens this year, should I put down a fungicide?*

A. Applications of fungicide for the control of snow molds must be made in late fall before snow cover. Chemical treatments in the spring — after the damage has been done — are not effective.

Since snow molds usually kill only the turfgrass leaves, the crown area of the plants will produce new leaf tissue if the dead, matted grass is raked up. This should be done before spring green-up and before pre-emergent crabgrass herbicides are applied.

Q. *What should be done for ornamentals that have been injured by the cold, winter weather.*

A. Prune out the dead wood, lightly fertilize and keep the plants well watered (don't overdo it) during the summer months. Mulch applied over the root system in the fall will help keep freezing temperatures from penetrating into the root zone.

Q. *I need current information on options for control of poison oak, also remedies for skin contamination from poison oak.*

A. Compounds such as Amitrol-T and Weedazol, which contain aminotriazole, are labeled for the control of poison oak. Be sure to read the label to determine if these products can be applied under your conditions.

The potential for skin contamination with poison oak can be minimized if protective clothing is worn and laundered immediately after application. A number of non-prescription creams and lotions which contain drying agents and relieve itching are available at drug stores. Among the most common products are Ziradryl, IVarest, and calamine and caladryl lotions. Severe allergenic reactions should be referred to a physician.

A. *What type of agitation — mechanical or Venturi — is more effective for wettable powders, and why?*

A. Mechanical agitation is usually more effective in suspending wettable powders. Hydraulic agitation will provide adequate suspension if the pump has sufficient capacity. Placing jets on the end of a separate pressure line for recirculation of 10% of the tank capacity per minute is usually recommended.

Q. *What green dye product can be mixed with Trimec weedkiller to give the lawn a better appearance?*

A. There are at least a dozen dyes or pigments on the market that will safely color turfgrasses. The dye formulations have a shorter residual than the plastic or latex pigments because they fade in the sun and wash off with water.

Among the products we have tested are Greenzit (W. A. Cleary Corporation), Winterlawn (Virginia Chemicals), and Ever-Bright (Davis Paint Company). All of these materials will stain pavement, etc., unless precautions are taken; and if applied during the growing season, they will be mowed off as the turfgrass grows.