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COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE &amp; LIFE SCIENCES

NORTH CAROLINA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Helping  
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Increase Their  
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Gardening,  
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Protect the  
Environment

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## JC Raulston Arboretum Plant Focus

## These Lilies Make You Wish for Rain

**Z**ephyranthes and Habranthus, or rain lilies, are unobtrusive, summer-flowering small bulbs that can fit into virtually any landscape. They take their name from their habit of blooming several times a season, usually following a rain. Despite the common name, the flower is classed as an amaryllis and springs from an onion-like bulb to a height of about 15 inches.

Delightful in rock gardens and naturalized in grassy areas, rain lilies bloom from early spring into fall. Solitary flowers on hollow stalks range in color from the purest of white to yellow, pink and even apricot. Unlike the more common spring-flowering bulbs, the rain lily has a limited amount of foliage, a feature I particularly like.

While *Z. atamasco*, a southeast U.S. native, is the most common, there are many others now available. *Z. candida*, a native to South America, has a 1-inch, pure white, star-like flower with dramatic golden anthers, and is striking in mass plantings. *Z. citrina*, originating in Central America, is one that can tolerate the worst of weather and soil and seems to go right on blooming with its marvelous, yellow, goblet-shaped flowers. *Z. 'Sunset Strain'* is an old hybrid with lovely, pinkish purple flowers. *Z. 'Grandjax'* is a fast-multiplying stunner with dozens of large, creamy pink flowers with white stars in the center. *Z. grandiflora* is my favorite with its 3-inch-long, rose pink flowers. What an eye catcher!

The JC Raulston Arboretum (JCRA) in Raleigh is one of the best places to view these and other rain lilies as well-established specimens. Head for the magnificent Perennial Border (with map in hand) to see *Habranthus robustus*, then walk over to the beds outside the Lath House for *Z. 'Grandjax'* as well as other rain lilies. Time your visit soon after a rainfall and discover the meaning of their common name. Learn more about the JCRA rain lily plantings by visiting [www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum](http://www.ncsu.edu/jcraulstonarboretum). **Karen Neill**



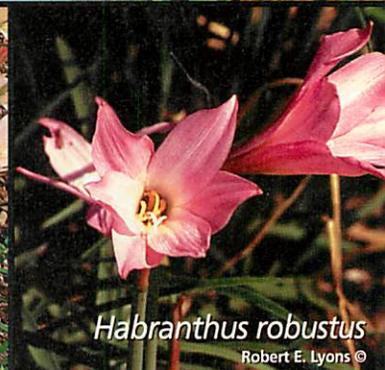
Rain Lilies  
Robert E. Lyons ©



'Sunset Strain'  
Robert E. Lyons ©



'Grandjax'  
Robert E. Lyons ©



Habranthus robustus  
Robert E. Lyons ©



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## Fall Is the Time to Tend to Your Cool-Season Lawn

Summer's heat and humidity may be starting to subside, and nothing could be happier than your lawn. Add in the hot, summer sun, and subtract any substantial rainfall, and you'll find your tall fescue lawn in dire need of a facelift.

The emotional roller coaster our lawns take us on is a bumpy one filled with many ups and downs. Beautiful green lawns are everywhere in the spring. As we move into summer, these once-lush, green lawns turn to a drab summer brown. As we roll into the fall, what better time to patch a few holes or, in some cases, even start over again from scratch.

To know which way you should go, it is best to do a site analysis of your existing lawn. Your lawn should have a uniform, medium green color. If it has any discolored spots, the lawn may have a disease problem, or a neighborhood dog may be using it as its bathroom. Are there any bare areas where nothing is growing? If weeds aren't growing in these areas, then grass won't either.

Take a look at the nonliving factors going on in the lawn. Excessive shade and root competition from large trees can pose a problem. Excessively dry or wet areas can be a problem for grass roots to grow in. These areas need to be corrected before grass can perform well. In some cases, it is best not to fight the factors you don't have any control of. Sometimes it's best to work with those limitations.

When it comes to whether to reseed or to renovate, look at the weed populations in your yard. If your lawn has 10 percent to 15 percent weeds in it, leave your lawn alone. The healthiest of lawns

fall into this category. However, if your lawn has 20 percent to 50 percent weeds in it, you may want to consider overseeding. If it has more than 50 percent weeds, then it is time to renovate the lawn.

Whether it is reseeding or renovating, it all begins with one thing: the soil test. Free through the N.C. Department of Agriculture, the soil test provides pH and nutrient level information about your soil. Based on your results, you will receive recommendations on how to improve your soil to grow a healthy lawn. Pick up your soil sample boxes at your local Cooperative Extension Center.

### Reseeding

If you have a decent lawn to work with, then reseeding may be what your lawn needs. The first thing you will need to do is to rent a core aerator. Run this aerator across the lawn like you would a tiller. It pulls out small soil plugs at a depth of 2 to 3 inches. This helps introduce much-needed oxygen back into the soil, and also helps the seed to make good seed-to-soil contact when you overseed. When seed is applied, water twice a day until grass begins to germinate.

### Renovating

While it costs more to renovate, it will be worth it in the long-term if your lawn needs serious attention. The first step is to prepare the soil. Till the soil to a depth of 8 to 10 inches. If the soil sample test

see **Lawns**, on page 3 ▶

## Fire Ant Control Calls for Caution

Fire ants are a nuisance and can harm people, animals and plants. Their painful, sometimes dangerous sting is used to immobilize or kill prey and to defend ant mounds. Once stung, humans experience a sharp pain which lasts a few minutes. The sting then starts itching and forms a blister. Fire ant colonies may be observed as mounds or more commonly may be constructed under the cover of stones, boards or other objects. They certainly can deter outdoor activities in yards, parks and schoolgrounds. Here are some options for controlling these pests.

- Granular products contain an insecticide that releases into the soil, usually when drenched with water. Use the recommended amount of product and water in gently so the mound is not disturbed.
- Liquid drenches are pesticides mixed with water first and then applied to the mound.

- Dry dust chemicals can be used that do not require water. These products can be sprinkled onto the mound.
- Baits are slower than most other mound treatments but can be effective in the hard-to-reach areas under sidewalks and curbs. These insecticides are carried from outside the mound to inside by worker ants.
- Organic or plant-derived products are available to control fire ants. Some contain pyrethrins, pine oil and citrus oil. These insecticides may be more costly and harder to find.
- Boiling water (about 3 gallons per mound) can eliminate fire ant colonies. Use caution handling and transporting boiling water. Keep in mind that this process might damage lawns and plant roots.

Remember to always use caution when dealing with pesticides. Wear safety protection equipment and read the labels before using. Contact your county Cooperative Extension Center for more information.

*Tim Clune*

## Q&A What has tunneled through my yard and what can I do about it?

**Underground tunnels with no surface openings indicate moles.** These native predators spend their time underground eating insects and earthworms. They seldom eat plants, but frequently take the blame. Most lawns contain a single mole which may tunnel 200 feet in one night's hunt. Since moles kill bad insects and aerate the soil, you may wish to ignore them. That also allows you to avoid the time and effort it takes to stop them. Repellents haven't proven effective. Chewing gum, lye, broken glass, bleach, electronic, magnetic

or vibrating devices haven't proven effective. Empty tunnels just prove the moles are hunting elsewhere. The castor bean plant may work but only right around the plant. Unless this is your only landscape plant, you can still have moles. Trapping works best. Set the trap on a frequently used tunnel. Find this tunnel by packing down all the tunnels and checking again the following day. Tunnels near sidewalks or foundations are most likely to be reused. Killing the moles' food supply with an insecticide labeled for white grubs works often enough to be worth trying.

**David Goforth**

## Lawns

*continued from page 2*

results call for lime, then this would be the best time to add it. Once it is tilled, then rake the soil until it is a flat bed, alleviating any low-lying areas.

Don't overwork your soil. Air pockets in the soil are vital to the success of growing grass. Without oxygen, roots can't function properly. Allow it to rain, or irrigate your raked bed to let the soil settle. When it has dried, rake it over again, breaking up the crusty surface. It is now time to seed the newly formed bed. September and early October are ideal times to reseed tall fescue seed. Use about 6 pounds of seed per 1000 square feet. Cover seed with pine straw at about 1 1/2 bales per 100 square feet. Water this area about twice a day for the next three weeks to ensure uniform germination. Seed will come up in 10 to 14 days.

For more information on lawn care in the Coastal areas, Piedmont or Mountains, contact your local Cooperative Extension Center and request Carolina Lawns or access [www.turffiles.ncsu.edu](http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu).

**Ben Dungan**

## ENVIRO-TIP

### Think "Grasscycling" When You Mow

Imagine saving money plus adding valuable nutrients to your lawn every time you mow. It's easier than you think and it begins with grasscycling. Instead of raking and bagging grass clippings, which add more waste to landfills, leave them on your lawn. An ecologically and financially sound program, grass clippings become a source of fertilizer which saves time and money. Grass clippings can generate up to 25 percent of the lawn's yearly fertilizer needs and reduce the amount of time and money you spend fertilizing and bagging. Lawns stay greener and healthier when clippings are left on them.

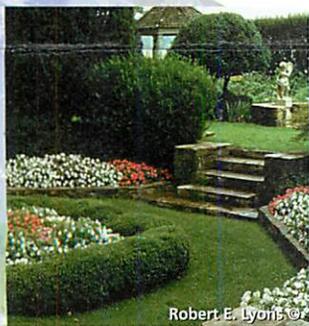
Grass clippings are 75 to 85 percent water, so when you mow regularly, clippings quickly decompose and release nutrients to fertilize the lawn.

Follow these simple guidelines for mowing when grasscycling and you will no longer need to bag clippings. In addition, your lawn will grow at an acceptable rate, retain a green

color and develop a deeper root system to keep it healthier.

#### A Grasscycler's Mowing Tips

- Any mower can be used to grasscycle. Make sure the mower is in good condition.
  - Mulching mowers are better for those who cannot mow on a regular basis.
  - Mow at the correct height. Mow tall fescue at a height of 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches. Mow Bermudagrass at 3/4 to 1 inch.
  - Mow with a sharp blade.
  - Mow when the grass is dry.
  - Mow regularly. Do not remove more than 1/3 of the growth at one time.
  - Leave those grass clippings on the lawn and pat yourself on the back for helping the environment!
- Darrell Blackwelder**



Robert E. Lyons ©

## gardentalk

"Zephyranthes grandiflora... as a child I thought of the little rose-colored lilies as the sign and seal of summer."

— Elizabeth Lawrence





*Sedum 'Autumn Joy'*  
Robert E. Lyons ©

Garden Spot

## The Davidson College Arboretum

in the town of Davidson features an excellent collection of native trees located on a college campus. In 1869, the Davidson College Board recognized the need to preserve the native trees. Their vision became reality and, in 1982, the college received official status as a working arboretum.

Many plants are labeled for ease of plant identification and the college offers a tree tour map available from the Building and Grounds Department. The campus is on 85 acres and paved walkways make it easily accessible to the disabled and families with strollers. The grounds are maintained using organic gardening principles.

The Davidson College Arboretum is open daily from sunrise to sunset. No admission fee is charged. For more information, call the Davidson College Arboretum at (704) 894-2220.

Cyndi Lauderdale

## Gardening in September

### Lawns

- Fertilize fescue and bluegrass lawns with 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.
- If fertilizing warm-season lawns, such as Bermuda and zoysia, use no more than 1/2 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. Also apply 1 pound of potash to improve winter hardiness.
- Seed fescue and bluegrass lawns through September.

### Ornamentals

- Perennial plants need to prepare for dormancy this time of year. Do not fertilize shrubs or perennial beds. Do not prune shrubs.
- Shop for pansies and spring-flowering bulbs while the selection is good. Pansies planted in early October will give the best winter show. Do not plant bulbs until late October in the Mountains and November in Coastal areas.
  - If English laurels, cherry laurels or ornamental cherries or plums are important to your landscape, you might consider spraying trunks around Labor Day with insecticide to prevent attack by peach tree borers.
    - Gardeners in the Mountains will need to prepare to bring houseplants in before temperatures dip below 45 degrees; inspect and treat for insects before bringing inside.

### Edibles

- It's not too late to plant greens, lettuce, cabbage, broccoli, beets and onions.
- Be on the lookout for cabbage worms and aphids on cabbages and leafy greens.

- Strawberry plants are developing flower buds for next spring's berries. For good production next year, fertilize strawberry beds with 1 to 2 pounds of 33-0-0 per 100 feet of row and keep the bed watered during September and October. *Linda Blue*



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