The large patch fungus (Rhizoctonia solani) attacks warm season turf during cool wet periods. The fungus eats at the plants roots, killing the grass in distinct near-circular patches.

Dr. Alfredo Martinez, UGA’s Turfgrass Disease specialist, has written a really good synopsis of the disease included below. You can also read it at www.georgiaturf.com.

Large patch disease is favored by:
- Thick thatch
- Excess soil moisture and poor drainage
- Too much shade which stresses turfgrass and increases moisture on turfgrass leaves and soil
- Early spring and late fall fertilization

Cultural practices are very important in control. Without improving cultural practices, you may not achieve long term control.
- Use low to moderate amounts of nitrogen, moderate amounts of phosphorous and moderate to high amounts of potash. Avoid applying nitrogen when the disease is active
- Avoid applying N fertilizer before May in Georgia. Early nitrogen applications (March-April) can encourage large patch
- Water timely and deeply (after midnight and before 10 AM). Avoid frequent light irrigation. Allow time during the day for the turf to dry before watering again
- Prune, thin or remove shrub and tree barriers that contribute to shade and poor air circulation. These can contribute to disease
- Reduce thatch if it is more than 1 inch thick
- Increase the height of cut

(Continued on page 6.)
Kissing bugs have been in Georgia for millions of years. They, and their relatives such as leaf-footed bugs and wheel bugs, are common. Kissing bugs are not deadly and most of them are not infected with the parasite that causes Chagas disease.

The Chagas disease parasite is transmitted only by the feces of specific kissing bugs. In other words, being bitten by the bug will not harm you but rubbing the bug’s excrement in your eyes might make you sick.

While Chagas disease is not uncommon in Central and South America, only 23 cases acquired here in the U.S. have been reported in the last 60 years. Areas of Texas just north of Mexico have lots of infected kissing bugs, and that’s why Texas is in the news.

For us here in the Southeast, the risk isn’t being bitten by a kissing bug (very little chance of that). The riskier behavior would be cleaning up raccoon, opossum, skunk or armadillo nests; that’s where the bugs live and where kissing bug feces are most concentrated. The animals aren’t the risk, nor is the bite of the bug; we can get infected with Chagas disease only by getting the bug’s feces inside us – through a break in the skin, through swallowing, through inhalation, or through rubbing our eyes. Again, not much risk if we stay away from the nests of wild animals.

Not every potential reservoir is infected. Here in the Southeast very few of the bugs carry the parasite. In the U.S. we are more likely to die in an automobile accident than to ever in our whole lives get infected with Chagas disease.

What can you do? Keep bugs out of your home by turning off porch lights at night to avoid attracting the bugs. Seal around doors and windows with weather-stripping and replace door sweeps; if cold air can’t get in, neither can kissing bugs. And, of course, freezing cold nights are sending kissing bugs into hibernation, so the risk is even lower this time of year.

Give thanks for your cozy home that protects you from kissing bugs.

Want more info on kissing bugs and Chagas disease? Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website.
Now is the time for Georgia homeowners to treat their lawns for weeds, according to a member of the world-renowned University of Georgia Turfgrass Team.

Waiting for a weed to become a problem before applying adequate control is the wrong approach for tackling weeds like thistles, dandelions and henbit, says Larry Baldree, a UGA crop and soil sciences research professional who works in Tifton, Georgia, alongside UGA turfbreeder Brian Schwartz.

“It’s being proactive instead of reactive. A lot of times, we’re very reactive to things, but when you see lawns that are weed-free, (those homeowners) are being very proactive. They’re getting a light application of fertilizer down in early fall and then getting their pre-emergence herbicide down now,” Baldree said.

To effectively manage winter weeds, Baldree suggests using a rate of atrazine of about a quart per acre. Two applications per year, though, are needed to prevent weeds from getting out of control.

“Atrazine will keep your weeds down throughout the fall. You’ll also want to do an application in late February as well, to control summer weeds. It’s got about a four-month activity period,” he said. “Making an application twice a year is the best management approach to take.”

Baldree issued the weed control directive just as weeds like thistles and dandelions are becoming problematic. A thistle is a prickly looking plant that can become tall and unpleasing to the eye. Baldree says that thistles left untreated will become a bigger problem in the following year.

“If you allow them to seed out one year, the next year you’re going to have numerous plants. Any preventative maintenance you’re doing now is going to be preventative maintenance for the future as far as keeping the seed crop down,” Baldree said.

(Continued on page 7.)
Despite their limited, two-month run on retailers' shelves each year, poinsettias are the best-selling potted plant in the United States. Growers sold more than 34.6 million plants in 2014 alone. But that popularity doesn’t always translate into longevity. Come February or March, many of these cherished decorations are droopy, yellowed or worse — in the trash.

Poinsettia plants can last for years if they are treated right, said Paul Thomas, professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

Here are Thomas' top tips for caring for poinsettias:

1. Before you buy a poinsettia, inspect it to make sure it has strong, sturdy stems, dense foliage all the way down its stems, that its bracts (colored leaves) have no blemishes and that its small yellow flowers have just barely opened. You can also carefully remove the plant from its pot to inspect the plant’s root system. If the plant has just a few roots or lots of dark brown roots, don’t buy it. Healthy poinsettias have plenty of tan and white roots.

2. These plants are susceptible to root rot, so don't overwater them or let them sit in water filled saucers. The holiday foil that florists wrap around some poinsettia pots can trap water in the pot, so it's best to remove it. Only water the plant when the soil surface feels dry, and add water just until water drains out of the bottom of the pot.

3. Poinsettias prefer warm temperatures and full sun, but they can spend a few weeks on a fireplace hearth or in the shade of a Christmas tree with the proper care. “During the holidays, you can place poinsettias just about anywhere to liven things up,” Thomas said. “They’ll last about three weeks in fairly dark places. “While it's in the dark, water only when the soil is dry. And don't fertilize it. Overwatering or fertilizing your poinsettia during the holidays when it is in dark conditions is the most common cause of rapid death.”

4. After the holidays, poinsettia caregivers should move them to a sunny window and apply a little houseplant fertilizer. “The bracts may begin to fall off fast,” Thomas said. “This is normal. If they last until March, your poinsettia was very happy where you put it.” In April cut the plant back to about 10 inches or until there are four to six nodes of the stem above the soil. “At this point, the poinsettia can be grown (in Georgia) outdoors in full sun,” Thomas said. “If (Continued on page 6.)
Welcome to our last newsletter of 2015! Wow! It is hard to believe we are at the end of another year. The end of the year is a great time to reflect on the wonderful work our green team has been doing. Now for those of you who are regular readers, welcome back! For any newbies, we along with our slithery friends welcome you. As we celebrate this last month of the year, we wish you a very happy and safe holiday season!

You may be wondering exactly how effective worms are when it comes to composting. Let us look at this in more detail. On average, one pound of worms can eat about three and a half pounds of food each week. We can then estimate that by vermicomposting, one family can divert about 14 pounds of food scraps from the landfill per month. Some people might look at that number and think, “Well, that is not very significant.” I am of the mindset, however, that each small contribution does make a difference; collectively, those 14 pounds of food scraps do add up! For example, we currently have about 1,500 readers of our monthly newsletter. If each person had a worm bin, we could potentially divert 21,000 pounds of food scraps from our landfills each month. Over the course of a year, we could divert over 250,000 pounds of food scraps from our landfills! And that is just from 1,500 households. In Atlanta alone, the population is over six million people. Now that would be A LOT of food scraps!

The lesson from this: we all can make a difference; and of course, our little worms are able to do an amazing job. Together, we make a great dream team!

In last month’s article, we discussed the basics of composting – the different types; how to get started; pros and cons; and some general how to’s. In line with that topic, this month, we will examine vermicomposting in a little more detail.

One thing I am consistently asked is what type of worm is best for a composting bin. People often wonder if they can just go into their garden and dig up some worms. Here is a little interesting fact: there are thousands of different types of species of worms! In fact, just within the earth worm family, there are said to be over 2,700 different kinds of earth worms! That is a whole lot of worms! I always tell people that each of us as human beings has special gifts and talents. This is also true of the worm family. Put another way, some worms are better suited for composting than others.

(Continued on page 7.)
• Improve the soil drainage of the turf
• Apply lime if soil pH is less than 6.5

Chemical control options can be found in the Georgia Pest Management Handbook: Homeowner Edition should be sprayed in late September-early October and in spring. Look for products containing Thiophanate methyl (Cleary’s 3336, Scotts Lawn Fungus Control) or Myclobutanil (Spectracide, Immunox Lawn Disease Control – RTU, Concentrate, and Granules)

*NOTE – When using pesticides, observe all directions, restrictions, and precautions on the pesticide label. It is dangerous, wasteful, and illegal to do otherwise. Store all pesticides in their original containers with labels intact and behind locked doors. Keep pesticides out of the reach of children.

Trade and brand names are for information only. The Cooperative Extension, The University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, does not warrant the standard of any products mentioned; neither does it imply approval of any product to the exclusion of others which may also be suitable.

(Steve D. Pettis is the UGA Extension Agriculture & Natural Resources agent in Rockdale County.)

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Red poinsettias with white poinsettias in the background. Image credit: Krissy Slagle

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Poinsettias can thrive for years if properly cared for, continued...

watered and fertilized, poinsettias will grow great outdoors. Trim them in June and plant them in 1-gallon pots or large indoor planters.”

5. **An outdoor poinsettia needs to be fertilized every week with a basic houseplant fertilizer during the spring and summer.** “If watered and fertilized properly, poinsettias will grow quite large, as high and wide as 5 feet,” Thomas said.

6. **To force your repotted poinsettia to bloom,** cover the plant after 6 p.m. starting September 22 and uncover it at 7 a.m. Do this until about November 10. This process will trigger the poinsettia to make new, colorful bracts and flowers just in time for the holidays.

(Merritt Melancon is a news editor with the University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.)
He says the best time for weed control and fertilizer applications in lawns is during September and October. While the time to “weed and feed” has passed, Baldree stresses that there is still time to apply appropriate weed control.

“Atrazine is a triazine product. It inhibits the seed and keeps it from germinating,” Baldree said.

Baldree stresses that atrazine should not be used on cool season grasses, like tall fescue lawns in north Georgia.

For more on Georgia turfgrass, go to GeorgiaTurf.com.

Now, let’s look at some characteristics of the composting worm. Then we will make the big reveal: what is the ideal composting worm?

First Group: Alabama Jumpers

Alabama Jumpers are a very active breed of worms. They are great in aerating your soil and loosening it up as they maneuver through it. The worm castings they leave behind in your garden are very nutritious and will help your plants. As the name implies though, these worms are very “jumpy.” When handled, they literally jump around! For this reason, they would not be ideally suited for an indoor composting bin, as proper bin maintenance requires you to move them around. **Conclusion: Alabama Jumpers are not ideally suited for a composting bin.**

Second Group: African Night Crawlers

African Night Crawlers are considered ideal for composting and fishing. The reason they are great for composting is their size. Because they are bigger, they can eat more and therefore compost large amounts of organic materials in a short period of time.

So if they are larger and can eat more, why wouldn’t they be the best choice for a vermicomposting bin? They are not our number one composting worm because they can be quite picky about their living environment. For example, because they are a tropical worm, they are not very tolerant of cooler temperatures. Therefore, unlike the red worm and the European Night Crawler, the African Night Crawler cannot take winter conditions. Also, if their worm bin does not meet their exact standards, they will try to escape. Picky, picky! The African Night Crawler is better suited for a more experienced worm composter who can handle this picky composting friend. **Conclusion: African Night Crawlers are efficient but better suited for more experienced composters.**

(Continued on page 8.)
Third Group: European Night Crawlers
European Night Crawlers are also ideal for composting and fishing. They are related to the red worm but tend to get a little bigger. Because of their bigger size, they compost materials quickly. Another reason that they are good candidates for composting is their laid back nature. They can tolerate different conditions in a worm bin, which is similar to their family member, the red worm. **Conclusion:** European Night Crawlers are good for a composting bin. Their size and laid back nature make them a good choice for this work.

And finally...let's get a drum roll, please!

**Our rock stars: Red Wiggler Worms**
Through my composting outreach efforts, I am often asked why the Red Wiggler is so well suited to composting. There are many reasons:

1. Red Wiggler worms are very tolerant to a variety of conditions. They can survive in a variety of temperatures and are open to being handled.
2. They compost material very efficiently.
3. These worms breed very rapidly. That means more worms are available to help us achieve our goal of removing 100% of organic materials from the landfill!

**Conclusion: Red Wiggler worms are the perfect composting worm! Thanks for your service, slimy friend!**

It has once again been my pleasure to share this time with you! I hope you have found value in this article and will join us again in a brand new year! We wish you a very happy and safe holiday season!

And remember – do not throw those food scraps away from the holiday feast you will be having! Consider instead feeding them to those hard working worms. Remember that your worm bin, even on a small scale, will make a difference and will have an impact on your community. That we each get to contribute and make a difference...now that is very exciting!
I have heard that you cannot use walnut shells in your compost, but I was not sure if I could use pecan shells. Are you aware if there are any problems with this as a compost additive?
- Karen B., Crawford

You are correct that walnut shells and hulls contain juglone, a chemical with allelopathic properties. Allelopathy is when one plant releases a toxin which suppresses the growth of another plant.

Walnut trees are known for their allelopathy. There is hardly ever another plant growing in the root zone of the tree.

Pecan trees also release juglone but to a much lesser extent. This chemical is typically found in the hull and shells of the pecan but not in the same amount as in the roots. If you have a large quantity of pecan shells, you may not want to use them in your compost pile, or you may want to stagger the addition over the course of a few months.

I would also recommend monitoring the plants to which you will be applying the compost. Established shrubs would have fewer problems with the compost than vegetable plants due to the more established root system.

If you are planning on using the compost for vegetables, try using the pecan shells in another part of the yard instead to avoid any issues. (Amanda Tedrow is the UGA Extension Agriculture & Natural Resources agent for Athens-Clarke County.)
Would you like to become a Georgia Master Composter?

If you enjoy working with people, digging in the dirt and talking “trash,” the Georgia Master Composter Program is for you! Established in 2011, the program is both an adult education course and Extension volunteer program.

Through a comprehensive training, you will learn the chemistry and microbiology of composting, types of and reasons for composting, backyard composting techniques and teaching tools. After the course you will join other Master Composters in teaching your family, friends and community how to compost!

**PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS:**

1. Consent to a background check (UGA requirement).
2. Complete classes, field trip and final project.
3. Volunteer a minimum of 40 hours within the first year and 20 hours each year thereafter to retain certification. Volunteer activities are coordinated by program facilitators and designed to provide training and support to new Master Composters.

**PARTICIPANT COMMENTS:**

- What a great program. I am so excited to do my volunteering.
- You told me I would get a lot for my money, and I totally agree! [The program is] a great investment!
- I learned so much more than I expected! I really enjoyed it!
- Thank you for helping me restore a love for my yard again.

**GEORGIA MASTER COMPOSTER 2016 PROGRAM**

**CLASS DATES:** Wednesdays, Feb. 10—April 13, 2016

**FIELD TRIP DATES:** March 5
(rain date March 19)

**TIME:** 6-8:30 p.m.

**LOCATION:**
ACC Solid Waste Dept.
725 Hancock Industrial Way
Athens, GA 30605

**COST:** $155

**TO APPLY:**
Call ACC Extension at 706-613-3640 or email atedrow@uga.edu
ugaextension.com/clarke/anr
athensclarkecounty.com/recycling

The University of Georgia is committed to principles of equal opportunity and affirmative action.
Lazy B Farm is holding a 2016 Beekeeping Series starting in January. The series includes six, three-hour classes held from 9 a.m.-noon. Any aspiring beekeepers are welcome to participate. The course will include hands-on learning in the bee yard for a portion of each class. The cost is $200 for the series. Discounts may apply. To register and for more information, visit www.thelazybfarm.com/beekeeping-series-2016 or call 770-289-2301.

On Wednesday, January 20, the State Botanical Garden of Georgia is holding the Native Plant Symposium. The event will be held from 8:45 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Cost is $60 or $54 for Garden members. The symposium will feature an exploration of prairies and savannas, the rarest and most endangered of Georgia’s natural communities. To register, visit the Garden website or call 706-542-1244.

On Monday, February 1, the registration deadline for the 2016 Georgia Master Composter Program. This adult education program is an in-depth course in composting microbiology and methods. Any adult with an interest in composting and community outreach is welcome to participate. To download an application, visit www.ugaextension.com/clarke/anr or call the Athens-Clarke County Extension office at 706-613-3640.
Non-Drought Outdoor Water Use Schedule*
Effective August 8, 2013

allowed daily
Between 4:00 pm and 10:00 am
- Automated irrigation systems
- Hand watering (without a shut-off nozzle)
- Lawn sprinklers

allowed anytime
By anyone
- Commercial pressure washing
- Drip irrigation or soaker hose
- Watering of food gardens
- Hand watering (with a shut-off nozzle)
- Hydroseeding
- Installation and maintenance of an irrigation system
- Irrigation of newly installed turf (for the first 30 days)
- Irrigation of public recreational turf areas
- Irrigation of plants for sale
- Irrigation of sports fields
- Water from a private well
- Water from an alternate source
  - grey water, rain water, condensate

Please note: The odd/even schedule still applies to non-landscape outdoor water use.

*This Non-Drought Outdoor Water Use Schedule is consistent with the Outdoor Water Use Rules set forth in the Georgia Water Stewardship Act that went into effect statewide on June 2, 2010.

Athens-Clarke County Water Conservation Office
706-613-3729 / savewater@athensclarkecounty.com
Outdoor Water Restrictions:
Barrow, Oconee & Jackson Counties

Outdoor water use for Barrow, Oconee, and Jackson Counties is now limited to three days per week with even number addresses allowed to water on Saturday, Monday, and Wednesday and odd number addresses allowed to water on Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday. The ban on watering between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM remains in effect for all scheduled watering days. No outdoor watering is allowed on Fridays other than exemptions below.

THE FOLLOWING USES ARE EXEMPT FROM ALL HOURLY/DAY OF THE WEEK RESTRICTIONS:

- Drip Irrigation
- Soaker Hoses
- Hand Watering
- Food Gardens
- New installations of plants and turf (with a permit)
- Grey Water, Rainwater and AC Condensation Reuse
- Golf Course - Tee and Green Irrigation
- Plants for sale, resale, or installation

Please be aware that water restrictions are subject to change.

For more information and additional exemptions please contact your county’s water conservation department.

HELPFUL INFORMATION ONLINE:

Find My Local Extension Office
Pest Management Handbook
SE Ornamental Horticulture Production & IPM Blog
Bugwood – Pest Images

Georgia Turf
Pesticide Applicator Info
Georgia Certified Landscape Professional
Landscape Alerts Online

Upcoming Trainings
Free Online Webinars
Georgia Certified Plant Professional
Extension Publications

MISSION STATEMENT

The UGA Athens-Clarke County Extension’s mission is to respond to the people’s needs and interest in Agriculture, the Environment, Families, and 4-H/Youth in Athens-Clarke County with unbiased, research-based education and information.

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