

# YARD & GARDEN REPORT

September 5, 2021

Vol. 9, No. 3

## Wasp Warning

Wasps are getting aggressive. Their populations are soaring, and they are coming for our food.

Wasps are already creating havoc in apple orchards. They are feasting on the apples that were punctured by thirsty birds this summer.

Apples that dropped to the ground this summer are being eaten, too.

This is only the beginning, and wasp attacks will worsen.

Many wasp nests currently have hundreds, if not thousands of wasps.

Their food sources in nature (mostly insects and plant sugars) are becoming scarce, leading them to us.

It's time for us to take action.

The first step is to remove possible food sources. Make sure your garbage cans are tightly sealed.

Any fallen fruits in your yard or garden should be raked up.

Be careful when eating outdoors. Wasps love picnics. Keep foods covered until you are ready to eat. Promptly clean any food messes.

Be especially cautious before drinking out of a container. If you accidentally drink a wasp, its sting can cause swelling and be life threatening.

Most wasp nests can be ignored, but if there are many wasps flying around, try to find the nest and determine if it is in a hazardous



location. A wasp nest is most easily detected on a sunny day, when hundreds of wasps will be flying in and out of the nest.

If you feel the nest is in a hazardous location, such as along a sidewalk or near a door, you may want to kill the colony.

Identify the hole of the nest and prepare for a nighttime assault. Wasps are less active at night, and they will all be at the nest.

Select a cold night. Wasps are much less active when temps are in the 50s or colder.

Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, trousers and a hat. Pull your socks over your pant cuffs.

Approach your foe with respect and courage. Be merciless.

Do not shine a flashlight directly at the nest. We want to surprise them.

If the nest is aboveground, spray a wasp-killing, knockdown spray into the hole. These sprays can be applied from 20 feet away.

If the nest is underground or hidden in a crevice, sprinkle carbaryl (Sevin) dust into the entrance.

Leave immediately. Over the next couple days, see how your assault worked. If you continue to see wasp activity in the nest, attack again.

Don't bother using wasp traps. Traps kill a small percentage of wasps.

Fortunately, wasp colonies will die after a hard frost.

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# Do You Have a Thatch Problem?

The worst effects of this summer's drought seem to be over. It's amazing to see our lawns green up after enduring one of the worst droughts in our state's history.

Not all lawns survived the drought. Many of these dead lawns had too much thatch (*right photo*).

Do you have a thatch problem? Now is a good time to check.

## What is thatch?

Thatch is a layer of roots, shoots and stems, both living and dead. This brown mat develops between the green vegetation and the topsoil.

## How does thatch develop?

Your lawn is a living system. It *produces* organic matter (grass blades, stems and crowns) at the same time it *decomposes* organic matter. When your lawn produces more organic matter than what it can decompose, thatch starts to build up.

## How much thatch should I have?

A thin layer is good. It insulates the lawn from temperature and moisture extremes. A little thatch makes the lawn more resilient.

A thick layer is bad. When thatch gets to be 1 inch thick, it makes roots more susceptible to drought, diseases and rot.

## How do I measure thatch?

Cut a wedge out of your turf. Pretend you are cutting a piece of pie and go down, 2 inches into the soil. Pull out the wedge. Measure the mat's thickness.

## What causes excessive thatch?

Too much fertilizer, pesticides and irrigation.



*Thatch is a brown, matted layer found between green vegetation and topsoil. When thatch gets 1 inch or thicker, the turf will weaken and may die.*

Aggressive fertilization creates too much plant growth for the microbes to decompose.

The excessive use of pesticides kills microbes and earthworms that decompose thatch.

Excessive irrigation will drown and kill soil microbes.

## Do grass clippings create thatch?

Not if the lawn is mowed regularly. Young grass blades are almost all water, and they decompose readily.

The problem is when you mow irregularly. Old, tall grass blades will get fibrous and decompose slowly.

## How can I prevent thatch?

Limit your fertilization to only what is needed. This is subjective, but the more you fertilize, the greater your risk of thatch build-up.

Core aeration is very helpful. Core aeration stimulates microbial activity in the soil. Core aeration will physically remove thatch, too.

Limit your use of pesticides. A lawn rarely if ever needs a fungicide or insecticide application.

## What if I have too much thatch?

Dethatching is recommended if your thatch is 1 inch or thicker.

Dethatching is a destructive process. It should be done when the turf grows actively and can recover quickly. Now is a great time.

You can remove thatch using a vertical mower. These are available at rental dealers, garden centers and hardware stores. Dethatching is also done by lawn care services.

Set the tines at a depth where they rake the thatch but cause minimal damage to the soil.

Rake up the debris. This debris may be composted. Irrigate the lawn to activate its healing.

You may aerate, overseed and fertilize the lawn after dethatching. Use a light, half-strength fertilization. Your lawn will recover in a few weeks.



# Vegetables



## Sowing a Cover Crop

Cover crops have emerged as a popular trend in gardening. These crops improve soil by adding nutrients, conserving moisture, collecting snow, loosening hard clay, and reducing erosion.

Winter rye is a very popular cover crop in North Dakota. It works well in areas of the garden that will be planted in warm-season vegetables (tomatoes, cucumbers and squash) next year.

Sow it in September (the sooner, the better). It will grow vigorously this fall and again in early spring.

Mow the rye in May and cultivate it deeply into the soil. Give it a couple weeks to decompose and then sow seeds or plant transplants.

Be aware that rye emits chemicals as it decomposes. These chemicals reduce the germination of small-seeded crops such as lettuce and carrots. Vegetable transplants and large-seeded vegetables are much less affected.

Winter rye is available from catalogs and farm supply stores. Sow it at 3 ounces per 100 square feet.



## Harvesting Cantaloupe

A ripe fruit slips off with a gentle tug. The entire stem comes out (*full-slip stage*) as shown. The rind is yellowish. Market melons may be harvested with a firmer tug; half of the stem attachment will remain in this case (*half-slip stage*).



## Harvesting Watermelon

Watermelons are ripe when the tendril next to the fruit dries. The rind of a ripe melon is faded, not glossy. Mature melons feel heavy. The spot on the underside of fruit will be white or yellow and not greenish.



## Stink Bugs on Tomato

Large, 5/8-inch-long bugs pierce fruits and suck juices. Spots are gold and cloudy. Pick off bugs and stomp on them (although the bugs emit a smelly odor). Pyrethroids may be sprayed, targeting the center of the plant using high pressure. Traps do not work.



## Powdery Mildew

Spray with chlorothalonil or copper to protect new growth. Reduce humidity and increase air circulation. Thin the planting, if needed. Water only in morning. Clean debris and cultivate the soil in fall. Sow resistant varieties.



## Harvesting Herbs

Oils are highest in the midmorning. Snip basil above a new set of leaves. Snip stalks of dill and cilantro at the base. Pinch flower buds before they open to extend harvest. For perennials, remove only about one-third of top growth.

# Fruits



## Harvesting Apples

Harvest when the background color of the fruit's skin turns from green to yellow. Fruits will come off easily when ripe. Harvest by using an upward and twisting motion to avoid damaging spurs, where next year's fruits develop.



## Bleeding Chokecherry

A pocket of disease (canker) has infected the tree. This infection will plug up the flow of water and nutrients, causing the branches to die back. Prune cankers going at least 8 inches below the discolored area. Cankers on trunks (*shown*) often lead to tree removal.



## Harvesting Rhubarb in Fall

The main harvest season ends around July 4 because the plant needs its stalks and leaves for growth in the summer. A few stalks may be removed in summer or fall on mature, vigorous plants. Don't harvest stalks if they have suffered any frost damage this fall.



## Thirsty Birds

The drought has forced birds to search for water in unusual places: apples. Remove damaged fruits, being careful not to be stung by wasps.

Netting is the best defense against birds. It is often used with cherry trees,

but rarely for apple trees. Apple trees are taller and damage levels to apples are sporadic. Scare devices such as one-eye inflatable balls, aluminum pie plates, shiny streamers and pinwheels, or plastic owls may (or may not) provide a short-term benefit.



## Cracked Apples

Apple fruits crack if they absorb a sudden burst of water. This often occurs after a major rain during a dry year, when fruits are sparse, and when fruits are nearly ripe. Apply bark mulch around the base of trees to keep soil moisture levels more consistent.

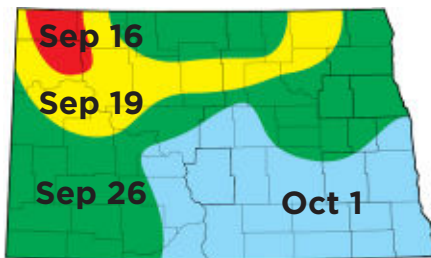


# Landscapes



## Fertilize Lawns

Early September is the best time to fertilize. This feeding will repair damage caused by summer, develop a thicker turf and root system, and prepare the lawn for winter. Select a fertilizer with potash, the third number on the bag (30–0–10 or something similar) to reduce drought and winter stresses.



## Planting Trees in Fall

Plant trees early enough to allow several weeks of root growth and recovery. Ideal planting dates are shown. Chances of success diminish later in the year, particularly with evergreens.



## Sow Lawn Seed

Sow seed by mid-September to allow seedlings sufficient time to get established before winter. Prepare the seed bed, apply a starter fertilizer mix, sow seed, rake seed in lightly, and keep the soil moist until seedlings emerge.



## Harvesting Annuals

Harvest in the morning after the dew has dried. Cut stems with a sharp knife or shears. Place in a pail of water or a shallow basket. Keep clean. Once indoors, put in a clean container of water. Make final cuts for bouquets. Use a floral preservative in the vase. Keep bouquets cool and out of direct sun.



## Aerate Lawns

Fall is the best time to aerate a lawn. Use a self-propelled unit with vertically operating, hollow tines. Two to four passes are best. Aeration is especially beneficial in compacted or thatchy soils. Best results are attained when the soil is slightly moist.



## Divide/Transplant Peony

Peony beds that are crowded and lack vigor can be divided now. Cut stems to the ground and dig up roots. Shake off the soil and cut the crown into sections. Each section needs 3–5 eyes and a strong root system. Space new sections 2–3 feet apart with eyes only 1–2 inches deep. Mulch after the ground freezes.

## Credits

### Sources:

Bauer, S. 2018. How to control thatch in your lawn. <https://extension.umn.edu/lawn-care/how-control-thatch-your-lawn>. University of Minnesota.

Landschoot, P. 2020. Managing thatch in lawns. <https://extension.psu.edu/managing-thatch-in-lawns>. Penn State University.

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[chiot's run/4740593634/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/joeshlabotnik/8680213092/). **Page 4.** Joe Shlabotnik, [www.flickr.com/photos/joeshlabotnik/8680213092/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/joeshlabotnik/8680213092/); Tom Kalb, NDSU (2); Hans via Pixabay; Lindy Berg, NDSU. **Page 5.** Tom Kalb, NDSU. Timo Newton-Syms, [www.flickr.com/photos/timo\\_w2s/8986743787/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/timo_w2s/8986743787/); Paul Tukey, <http://www.safelawns.org/blog/2010/10/now-is-the-time-to-aerate-if-you-must/>; Joe Zeleznik, NDSU; BlueRidgeKitties, [www.flickr.com/photos/blueridgekitties/4836624430/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/blueridgekitties/4836624430/); F. D. Richards, [www.flickr.com/photos/50697352@N00/22436008005/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/50697352@N00/22436008005/).

Written by Tom Kalb, who expresses gratitude to the Hort./Forestry Team for their contributions to this report.

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EXTENSION

# Weather Almanac for August 29–September 4, 2021

Site	TEMPERATURE <sup>1</sup>				RAINFALL <sup>1,4</sup>				GROWING DEGREE DAYS <sup>1,5</sup>			
	Aug 29–Sep 4				Aug 29–Sep 4				Aug 29–Sep 4			
	Avg	Norm	Max	Min	Total	Norm	Total	Norm	Total	Norm	Total	Norm
Bottineau	64	63	85	40	0.27	0.39	8.30	12.03	94	80	1922	1827
Bowman	64	64	87	41	0.16	0.24	7.25	10.16	89	86	1950	1887
Carrington	65	64	81	50	0.93	0.51	7.30	13.69	93	83	2109	1969
Crosby	65	61	88	42	0.00	0.31	8.04	10.49	99	77	1876	1692
Dickinson	65	63	86	45	0.33	0.34	8.57	11.59	95	87	2064	1864
Fargo	68	65	82	54	2.25	0.66	11.44	13.81	106	91	2438	2117
Grafton	65	63	80	47	0.10	0.67	8.83	13.62	94	80	2110	1834
Grand Forks	66	63	82	49	1.02	0.58	8.56	13.51	96	80	2189	1886
Hazen	64	65	82	46	1.10	0.35	7.81	11.79	88	92	2032	2049
Hillsboro	66	64	83	49	2.38	0.55	9.37	13.81	97	85	2213	2000
Jamestown	65	64	82	50	0.55	0.58	13.86	13.05	90	81	2093	1960
Langdon	62	61	77	46	0.20	0.48	12.68	13.63	77	69	1803	1572
Mandan	66	64	83	49	1.30	0.40	8.45	12.76	92	85	2208	1964
Minot	64	63	84	46	0.27	0.40	7.14	12.08	89	77	2007	1798
Mott	64	64	85	43	0.70	0.31	12.45	10.96	89	91	2019	1946
Rugby	65	62	83	46	0.26	0.42	9.59	13.38	95	79	2000	1820
Wahpeton	67	66	85	50	1.86	0.73	12.40	14.28	98	97	2302	2206
Watford City	67	63	86	48	0.03	0.27	7.29	10.21	105	83	2081	1882
Williston	67	66	87	45	0.00	0.32	7.18	10.02	108	96	2124	2123
Wishek	65	63	81	51	0.63	0.38	14.19	11.67	92	80	2139	1786

## DAYLENGTH (September 5, McClusky, ND)<sup>2</sup>

Sunrise: 7:06 AM Daylength: 13h 10m  
 Sunset: 8:15 PM Change since Aug 29: –23m

## LONG-TERM OUTLOOKS<sup>3</sup>

Sep 10–14: Temp.: Above Normal; Precip.: Normal  
 Sep 12–18: Temp.: Above Normal; Precip.: Normal

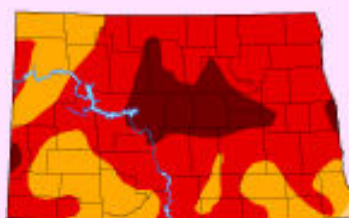
<sup>1,2,3</sup> Sources: North Dakota Agricultural Weather Network, [www.sunrisesunset.com](http://www.sunrisesunset.com), and National Weather Service, respectively.

<sup>4,5</sup> Rain data begin April 1. GDDs for garden vegetables are not available. GDD data in this table are for corn, which responds to temperature as most vegetables grown in gardens. Data begin May 1 with base minimum and maximum temperatures of 50 and 86°F, respectively.

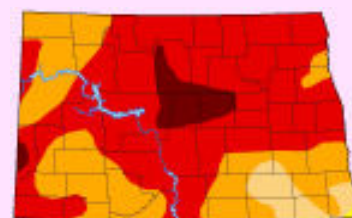
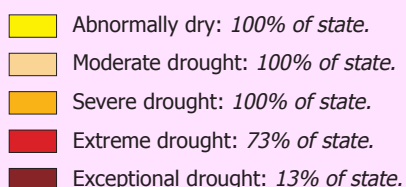
## Drought Watch

Weather patterns shifted in a positive direction, but our historic drought continues. Appreciable rains occurred in all but northwestern North Dakota last week.

Over the next two weeks we can expect above normal temperatures along with normal amounts of rain. Sources: Drought Monitor, University of Nebraska; and National Weather Service.



August 24, 2021



August 31, 2021

