

WLVR
Bethlehem, PA
Quarterly Program Topic Report
October 1st 2022 – December 31st 2022

Issues:

AGRICULTURE/GARDENING
MEDICINE/HEALTH/DIET
ELECTIONS

Programs:

AGRICULTURE/GARDENING

Series Title: You Bet Your Garden
Episode Number: 1216 (different episode weekly)
Length: 60 Minutes
Airdate: 12/8/2022 12:00:00 PM
Service: WLVR
Format: Instructional
Segment Length: 00:7:00
Topics: Gardening/HOME/FOOD

CRINGING OVER CREOSOTE

On this episode of YBYG Mike helps you cringe over Creosote! Is Creosote is the reason your grass won't grow?! Plus your fabulous phone calls!!
Squash Vine Borer Prevention

Is Creosote the Cause When Grass Won't Grow?

Q. Colin writes: "Dear Mr. Mike: My family purchased a wonderful house in Oklahoma City, mostly because of the amazing backyard. However, the previous owner lined the fence with oozing railroad ties and now we cannot get any grass to grow within six feet of the fence. We removed the logs of death before planting sod and seed. Now the dogs are constantly tracking mud and failed-lawn debris into the house. Could the soil be contaminated? If so, how can we neutralize? My lawn guy is stumped as well."

A. I asked Colin a few pertinent questions about timing and seed selection. Here's his reply:

Q. "We sodded fescue in mid-April, overseeded with more fescue in May, and then seeded Bermuda grass in early June. The area is mostly shaded by the fence and our neighbor's fifty foot tall oak. (The tree's trunk is 20 feet from the fence line but we still get a constant sprinkle of acorns.)

"Grass will sprout but will not mature or withstand a mowing or two in this area. The rest of my lawn is very healthy, and we use an organic weed/feed service whose employees are also stumped by our failure to grow anything along the "muds of Mordor". The dogs use other, grassier areas as their preferred relieving spots, just in case you were thinking of them as a culprit. Thanks for your help!"

A. First thoughts: Fescue is a cool-season grass that should only be seeded in early Fall. But fescue SOD applied in April should have thrived. On the other hand, Bermuda is a warm-season grass that should be planted in the Spring. I say 'planted' as opposed to 'seeded' because Bermuda is typically installed vegetatively by putting little plants in the ground, just like Zoysia grass.

Second thoughts: no grass will thrive in deep shade and/or constantly wet soil. That said....

Your soil is almost certainly contaminated with a Witch's Brew of toxins from the creosote used to preserve those railroad ties. They were probably leaking the nasty stuff into your soil for who knows how many years before you moved in.

Keep dogs and humans away from that area by erecting a temporary fence and watch the dogs for any signs of illness or lethargy. Dogs (and cats) have soft paws that easily absorb contaminants. Blood tests for creosote are somewhat problematic, as {quote} "creosote" is actually a complex mixture of chemicals that, according to a fact sheet from the State of Virginia, contains at LEAST 300 different toxins. It is NOT a single element like lead or cadmium.

Explain the situation to your vet; they may choose to run some tests on your pooches or send you elsewhere for a more sophisticated exam.

Creosote is a "restricted use pesticide", meaning they can still use it to treat railroad ties, telephone poles and even {gulp!} wood used to make some 'log cabin' homes. It is a known cancer causer and is especially dangerous to chimney sweeps who clean the highly flammable material off the insides of wood stove pipes and chimneys. Technically, homeowners should not be able to buy it.

The base material can be processed from the wood of the 'creosote bush' (chaparral), which is not a single plant, but a community of like-minded plants that thrive in the torrid deserts of the Southwestern US. The plants are highly aromatic and highly flammable.

But the majority of creosote in use today comes from coal and its residues, especially 'coal tar', which in very small concentrations was (and in some cases still is) used as a remedy for psoriasis. Increase the percentage and you do NOT want to know what kind of cancer you're inviting.

Technically, homeowners should not be able to buy creosote treated products. But even though many sources report that creosote products are somewhat-to-totally illegal to sell to homeowners, huge piles of "used railroad ties" remain visibly for sale at far too many Big Box stores. Criminality without enforcement is just a grease mark on the wall.

OK: Remediation. It sounds like the area is constantly wet, so improving the drainage via drain tiles might be your first step.

Then, move on to physical removal. Many companies perform this task for lead-contaminated soil; they dig it up and take it to a specialized incinerator. Then you'd be starting with a much lower concentration of creosote.

What then? I'm thinking that installing a concrete slab over the excavated area might be the best solution. Stamped and colored concrete slabs look great. Have it cover a larger-than-necessary area, and put a grill, a table and some chairs out there to enjoy the long outdoor entertaining season in OKC. That big tree will even provide some shade!

Otherwise, the Hail Mary Pass here would be to drain the area and then install plants that take up large amounts of toxic material. Remember that matter and energy cannot be created or destroyed; only changed in form. So these plants cannot be eaten, as they will become "full of it". They must be trashed. (I would NOT burn them.)

This technique, properly called phytoremediation, can be extremely effective. A few examples: Alpine penny grass is the choice for cadmium contamination; and Indian mustard (a very attractive plant) removes lead, selenium, zinc, mercury, and copper from the soil.

And the plants shown to remove the most basic elements of creosote (coal tar and pitch) are sunflowers; that's a very nice fence line plant. Just don't eat the seeds, and do what you can to keep birds, bees and butterflies away as well.

<https://www.iamcountryside.com/growing/phytoremediation-plants-clean-contaminated-soil/>

MEDICINE/HEALTH/DIET

Story Title: Doctors warn of 'tripledeemic' hitting the Lehigh Valley
Episode Number: 101
Length: 5 Minutes
Airdate: 11/9/22
Service: WLVR
Format: Interview format relevant local Medical Professionals

LehighValleyNews.com | By Brittany Sweeney
Published November 9, 2022 at 2:00 PM EST
Brittany
A man blows his nose.

BETHLEHEM, Pa. -- Health professionals in the Lehigh Valley are warning people about what they call a "tripledeemic."

COVID-19 continues to spread, flu season is expected to be severe, and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is plaguing children earlier than normal.

Lehigh Valley Health Network held a Facebook town hall Tuesday to address the rise in cases of coronavirus, influenza and RSV. The three illnesses pose serious risk to the very young, the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.

COVID-19 continues to spread, flu season is expected to be severe, and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, is plaguing children earlier than normal, experts say

Dr. Tibi Villalobos, an LVHN pediatric infectious disease specialist, said many children were not exposed to viruses during the pandemic and therefore they did not build up immunity

LVHN held a virtual town hall on Tuesday to try to get out warnings about the "tripledeemic"

Dr. Timothy Friel, chairman of the department of medicine at LVHN, said the preventative measures used during the height of the pandemic protected us from COVID as well as other very common respiratory viruses, but now our ability to develop an immune response has diminished.

"As we move into this new winter, what we are seeing is there is a whole group of individuals, especially small kids, who've never been exposed to RSV, who have never been exposed to flu, many of them have never been vaccinated for flu," Friel said.

The infectious disease specialist said the fact that all three viruses are going to be happening simultaneously is what is most concerning from a health care system standpoint.

"We're seeing a clear uptick earlier than ever and at higher volumes and levels than we've ever seen before, primarily impacting our kids, but also impacting adults," he said, referring to the spread of RSV.

Dr. Tibi Villalobos, an LVHN pediatric infectious disease specialist, weighed in on what the RSV picture looks like among children in the Valley.

This is totally different, what we're having right now in the valley and in the rest of the country, compared to what we traditionally see in RSV."

Dr. Tibi Villalobos, an LVHN pediatric infectious disease specialist

"This is totally different," Villalobos said. "What we're having right now in the valley and in the rest of the country, compared to what we traditionally see in RSV," she said.

Villalobos said that many children were not exposed to viruses during the pandemic and therefore they did not build up immunity. Now, many of them are being exposed, getting sick, and taking the illnesses home to younger siblings.

"So there is a continuation of transmission right now from the school, the daycare, and family that we haven't seen in recent years," she said. "And this is overwhelming."

She noted there is no vaccine for RSV, although one is currently being looked at by the FDA.

Meanwhile, Friel said the viruses are back with a vengeance and advises people to take precautions such as getting vaccinated, washing hands often, and keeping an eye out for symptoms that may crop up.

He said he and his colleagues are informing the public now to lessen the blow of when the tripledeemic reaches its peak.

ELECTIONS

Story Title: Pa. Supreme Court ruling has counties set aside undated mail-in ballots, but Lehigh, Northampton say there are few
Episode Number: 101
Length: 5 Minutes
Airdate: 11/7/22
Service: WLVR
Format: Interview format

LehighValleyNews.com | By Hayden Mitman
Published November 7, 2022 at 3:31 PM EST

ALLENTOWN, Pa. - A Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling last week has tasked all of the state's 67 counties with putting aside mail-in ballots that are in undated or incorrectly dated envelopes.

And in the Lehigh Valley, with the midterm elections upon us, local officials are taking extra steps to prevent any issues when votes are tallied.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has ruled that counties must put aside mail-in ballots that are undated or have incorrect dates

Northampton County has set aside nearly 300 mail-in ballots because of those issues

Lehigh County has seen fewer than 60 mail-in ballots with these issues
Voters are being contacted and will be able to fix these issues before the end of Election Day

Northampton County Board of Elections has set aside 60 incorrectly dated and 226 undated mail-in and absentee ballots, county spokeswoman Becky Bartlett said in an email.

Bartlett said those voters were contacted via email and a letter in the mail to tell them of their error and tell them to come into the elections board's office and fix their ballots by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

She also said that as votes are counted on Election Day, the Election Board "will review all provisional ballots and any ballot for which there are questions."

In Lehigh County where, recently, a similar issue saw a judicial election settled by just five votes after a series of legal challenges - county Elections Director Tim Benyo said they've seen few undated or incorrectly dated ballots so far.

Benyo said that, as of Monday afternoon, just 39 mail-in ballots were found with an incorrect date and only 17 were missing a date.

There also were four mail-in ballots with which the board had issues with a voter's signature.

The Pennsylvania Department of State has asked counties to share the data they're collecting by Monday because its automatic ballot tracking system is not designed to provide it.

Several counties have said their staff are unable to answer that request. Others have shared the numbers of undated or incorrectly dated ballots.

Hayden Mitman

I'm Lehigh County reporter for LehighValleyNews.com. A graduate of William Allen High School in Allentown and Moravian College in Bethlehem, I was born and raised in the Lehigh Valley. I joined Lehigh Valley Public Media in 2018 and have more than 15 years of experience as a reporter working in television, radio and newspapers. I'm an avid fan of local sports, sci-fi movies, comic books and video games. But my favorite pastime is being a dad and spending time with family.