

BLOOD PRESSURE

TAKE CONTROL OF THE SILENT KILLER



High blood pressure, or hypertension, is sometimes called the silent killer because there are often no symptoms. That's why keeping track of blood pressure is one of the most important things a person can do to stay healthy, said doctors at Baylor College of Medicine.

Left untreated, hypertension, can cause organ damage over time, leading to heart attack, blindness, kidney failure or stroke, said Dr. Biykem Bozkurt, professor of medicine at BCM.

Some factors that are associated with hypertension are diabetes, family history of hypertension, being overweight, taking in too much sodium, drinking excessive alcohol and smoking. Generally a healthy

reading is 120/80, and hypertension diagnosis is made at 140/90. People considered prehypertensive generally have readings that fall between 120/80 and 140/90. Doctors always check blood pressure as part of appointments and there are also many locations where blood pressure machines are available for anyone to have their pressure checked. Bozkurt advises talking to a doctor to determine if your reading is at a healthy level rather than taking the machine's reading at face value.

"For a relatively healthy person not suffering from any other illnesses, only a few lifestyle changes like diet modifications and exercise may be needed," said Bozkurt.

The Forum

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A Dynamic Duo That Can Help Your Lawn Weather The Drought

by Brett Briant | LCRA Water Conservation Coordinator

Some things just go together, and mulch and compost are two of them. When used together, this formidable pair not only improves your garden and lawn, but they also use water more efficiently.

The combo is important as many of us move to maximum once-a-week watering during this time of severe drought. The pair can help your landscaping survive the drought because plants will be more disease tolerant and water efficient, thereby better able to defend themselves against the drought.

Using a hardwood mulch/compost blend is the best choice for retaining water and improving your soil. The mix will hold its color longer, and the compost will help break down the mulch, which will become a beneficial nutrient for your soil.

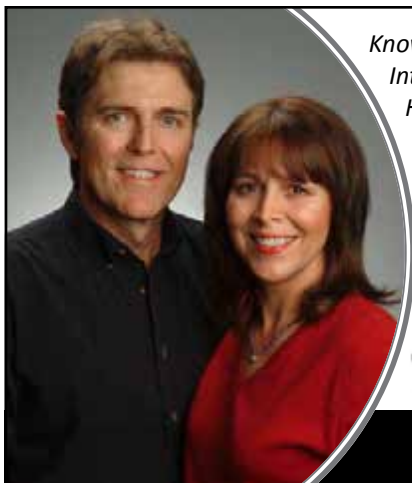
However, if you choose to go with one or the other, keep in mind that you can use compost as mulch, but you can't do the opposite. You can't use straight mulch as compost – it's too hard on its own and takes too long to break down and become a beneficial micro-organism to your soil. Mulch should smell like a fresh forest floor. A mulch/compost blend should have a carbon-to-nitrogen ratio of about 20-to-1. That's 20 percent carbon to 1 percent nitrogen. When applying this to your existing soil, a soil depth of at least six inches is highly recommended. You can build your soil with the mulch and compost through either

core aeration, where you remove approximately 1 inch by 2 inch cores of soil from the ground to improve the infiltration of water/nutrients, or through light scarifying with a rototiller to remove any debris from the lawn.

A good layer of mulch of about two to four inches in your garden will help suppress weeds. It will also hold in moisture in the heat, and help keep the soil warmer in the winter and cooler in the summer. If you are using it as a top dressing to improve the soil on your lawn, you will want to apply a layer of compost that is one-fourth of an inch to one-half of an inch deep.

Another benefit of adding compost to most types of soil, including clay, sandy, alkaline or acidic, is that compost has natural pH buffers. That's the microbiology or bacteria in the soil that creates a healthy environment for your plants. The pH level should be close to neutral, which is a pH of 7. If you add compost to your lawn and compost/mulch to your beds, you will build the soil profile to be much more water efficient and increase its capacity to hold water. The soil will be able to drain and breathe.

Using mulch and compost together is a cost-efficient way to build your soil. They're relatively inexpensive and will help cut down on your water bill. It's a pair you want on your team.



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NATUREWATCH

by Jim and
Lynne Weber

Ghosts in the Graveyard

Commonly found growing in rural areas including graveyards, Twistleaf Yucca (*Yucca rupicola*) is sometimes called 'ghosts in the graveyard', for when in bloom the clusters of white flowers on thin stalks appear as floating apparitions. But this common plant, which is widespread in our area, has a much more uncommon, mysterious association with a rarely seen butterfly called the Yucca Giant-Skipper (*Megathymus yuccae*).

Flying in the spring, the Yucca Giant-Skipper is a medium-sized, robust-bodied butterfly with a fast, powerful flight. Above, its dark forewings are elongated with a variable pale yellow outer band, and a yellow marginal border can be seen on the hindwings. Below, the hindwings are a dark blackish brown with a violet-white frosting and prominent triangular white spot along the leading margin. Males and females are similar, but females are generally larger and males have wider, more rounded forewings. Although fairly common, this species is like a ghost in the butterfly world, as sightings of adults are rare.

The most fascinating aspect of these butterflies is how they depend on the Twistleaf Yucca to carry out their life cycle. Males perch on low

vegetation or on the ground near twistleaf yuccas, awaiting passing females. Producing only one generation per year from February to May depending on location, the cycle begins when the female butterfly lays a single egg on the leaf of a Twistleaf Yucca. The young larvae (or caterpillar) feeds on the leaves of this plant and constructs small, individual silken shelters to protect itself as it grows.

Once larger, older larvae bore deep into the plant crown and feed within the root, constructing a prominent silk tent at the opening of the burrow. Active tents can be discovered by looking for larvae excrement (called 'frass') that is pushed out of the tent opening before the larvae pupates. In the spring, the adult butterfly emerges from the tent opening and allows its wings to dry before it takes flight and begins the search for a mate. Adult yucca giant-skipper do not visit flowers to feed, and it is unknown how long they live, or if they utilize other food sources.

Look closely and take care when performing your winter landscape cleanup, so as not to unwittingly destroy the tents that may be present on your Twistleaf Yucca plants. These ghosts of the graveyard may just be harboring ghosts of their own!



LEFT: Twistleaf Yucca bloom stalk

MIDDLE: Yucca Giant-Skipper tent (photo by D. Hanson)

RIGHT: Yucca Giant-Skipper (photo by Randy L. Emmitt)

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Empty Nest Chance To Chase Forgotten Dreams

Middle age woes are hard enough to deal with, but throw in empty nest syndrome and it is a recipe for potential depression. Psychologists at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston say not to look at it as an ending, but as the beginning of a new stage in life with more time to travel, develop new hobbies, rediscover forgotten dreams and get to know your spouse all over again.

"Parents have channeled all of their energy into their children for so long they may not know what to do with their time once they leave," said Dr. James Bray, associate professor of family and community medicine at BCM.

Empty nest syndrome often leads to divorce, but parents should assume that leaving your spouse will make the unhappiness go away.

"Marriage takes time and energy, so make the effort to get reacquainted," Bray said.

Talk with friends to reevaluate goals and take note of some lifelong dreams you haven't had time to accomplish, said Bray. There may be more time to take dance classes, travel, exercise or go back to college to retool skills. The empty nest transition usually lasts six months to a year, depending on how well parents can adjust to their newly found freedom.



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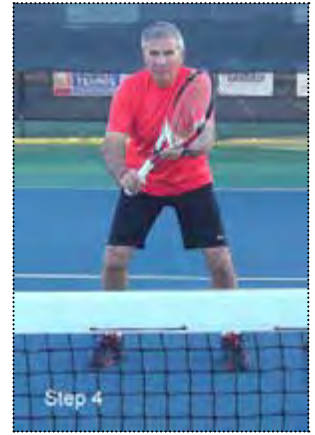
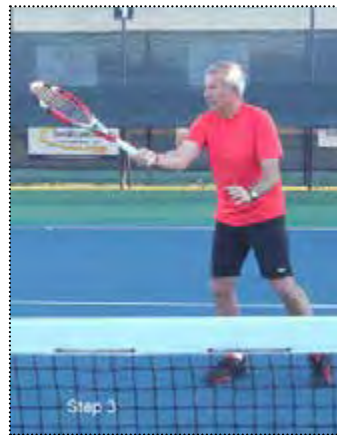
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TENNIS TIPS

By USPTA/PTR Master Professional
Fernando Velasco



HOW TO EXECUTE THE FOREHAND DROP SHOT

In previous newsletters, I offered tips on how to hit the forehand groundstroke, the two-handed backhand, the one-handed backhand, the forehand volley, the two handed backhand volley, the serve, the forehand half-volley, the one-handed backhand volley, the overhead “smash”, the forehand service return, the backhand service return, the forehand high volley approach shot, the two handed high volley approach shot, the one-handed high volley approach shot, the forehand lob, the two-handed backhand lob and the one-handed backhand lob.

In this issue, I will offer instructions on how to execute the Forehand Drop Shot. This shot is used when a player is deep on the baseline and returns a short soft ball. The player hitting the drop shot is forcing the opponent to run toward the net. This ball should be hit high enough to clear the net and almost bounce back toward the net. If the player running for the shot can get it on the first bounce, it will likely be off balance and will be forced to make an error or return for an easy put away volley. In the illustrations, Fernando Velasco, Manager and Director of Tennis at the Grey Rock Tennis Club, shows the proper technique to execute this stroke. This shot can also be executed from the base line when the opponent is expecting a deep return of a serve.

Step 1: The Back Swing: When Fernando detects the ball landing short and high, he starts his back swing high and compacted. He is using the continental grip and keeping his eyes focused on the flight of the ball. His left hand is up front to keep the proper body balance.

Step 2: The Point of Contact: Fernando is now ready to perform the drop shot. His eyes are now focused on the point of contact and the face of the racket is angled up to create the underspin on the ball. His goal is to keep his head still. His left hand is still in front and his weight is shifting toward his left foot.

Step 3: The Follow Through: The success of a drop shot is to keep the ball on the strings as long as possible. Fernando is almost “cupping” the ball during the follow through. Fernando’s grip is relaxed and the head of the racket is pointing toward the sky. His left shoulder is almost opening to the net and his eyes are following the path of the ball.

Step 4: The Ready Position: Once Fernando finishes the stroke, his goal is to follow the path of the drop shot. If he created a good drop shot and sees his opponent running with the head of the racket down, Fernando will move closer to the net or anticipate the angle shot. More likely it will be an easy sitter for a put away volley.

Look in the next Newsletter for: How to execute “The Backhand Drop Shot”

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