January 27, 2005

I looked behind the entertainment center one day. I found an old shriveled balloon. I was going to toss it but quickly heard a chorus of concerned voices. “Don’t pop it! It is Prissy!” Prissy was our cat. She died about 15 months earlier. After she was gone, my oldest girl Elizabeth made a balloon that looked like Prissy. The ‘Prissy Memorial Balloon’ had survived for 15 months and I was told in no uncertain terms that I was to allow it to stay!

Do you have some things you would like to get rid of, but find it hard to part with them? Some of our problems are like this. Consider Florida betony.

**How do I control this rattlesnake weed I find in my yard?** This weed is also called Florida betony. Florida betony is not a balmy vacation spot. It is a perennial weed. That means it comes back again every year. The leaves are opposite each other on the stem and are about one inch long with little teeth on them. The stem is square and flowers are white or pink with purple spots. It has a white underground tuber that looks like a rattle snake rattle. The plant smells when crushed.

Florida betony invades lawns and flower beds. Herbicides kill the top but the weed will re-grow. This means you will have to re-treat for several years. Also, you must treat it all for best control. If you miss some, the weed will continue to spread. Do you get the idea that Florida betony is hard to control?

Spray the weed whenever you see it in the lawn with Weed Be Gone. In flower, tree or shrub beds use Round Up or similar chemicals. Use Weed Be Gone or Round-Up repeatedly every four weeks or so as long as you can see weed growth. You may have to do this several years to make an impact. Remember that Round Up (and similar chemicals) will damage green leaves and green stems it touches. Keep it off your good plants.

Casoron (dichlobenil) is a pre-emergence herbicide that helps to control Florida betony. It must be used in the cooler months and may be very difficult to find.

Is there any other way to control Florida betony? You can pull it over and over again. This will slow its spread and may slowly kill it. Do not let any plants escape. Dig up the tubers. This is where it grows from. Do not move soil with Florida betony tubers or roots in it. Mulch heavily all beds, though this is not a big help with this weed.

**What are your suggestions for putting lime on a centipede yard?** Soil pH is a measurement of the acidity of the soil. If a soil is too acid (has a pH that is too low) or too basic (the pH is too high) then the plant cannot get the nutrients out of the soil that it needs. The nutrients can be in the soil but unavailable due to low pH. Low pH can also make some toxic elements more available in the soil which can damage the plant roots.

Many of our soils here are acid. Lime is a chemical used to raise the soil pH. How do we know if we need to lime the soil and how much lime to use? Take a soil sample.

Do not lime centipede lawns without a soil sample. You can add too much lime and cause serious problems. Liming a centipede lawn without a soil sample is like hunting in the dark. You might be successful but more than likely you will miss your target and someone can easily get hurt. I generally do not recommend liming a centipede lawn without a soil sample.

An exception to this rule is the low levels of lime that some landscapers put out to counteract the effect of the fertilizer they apply. Very small amounts of lime probably will not hurt, but I still highly recommend a soil sample before you lime.

Lime is like medicine. You generally only use it if you know you have a problem and need it.