



## LAWN CARE BASICS

The three most important aspects of lawn care are fertilizing, mowing and watering. Correctly done, these along with other maintenance practices will provide a healthy green lawn with a minimum of negative effects on the environment.

### FERTILIZING

Use a balanced fertilizer with the NPK amounts in a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P), and potassium (K). Fertilize up to five times a year, or as needed to maintain a healthy-looking lawn. Grasscycling (also called mulch mowing) provides the equivalent of one or two fertilizer applications. A good way to remember is to fertilize on the holidays of Easter, Memorial Day, 4th of July, Labor Day and Halloween. Research shows that fall fertilizations are most important, but with a low nitrogen formulation. Formulations for fall/winter applications are available. *Quick release* fertilizers release all their nitrogen immediately and result in quick greening and growth spurts. *Slow release* fertilizers release nitrogen over a longer period of time and produce more uniform turfgrass growth and color. There are also organic fertilizers on the market, which can add to soil health. Read the labels and choose the fertilizer that best meets your lawn's needs.

### MOWING

Sharp blades are necessary! Sharpen every 6 weeks or have an extra blade on hand and rotate blades every 6 weeks. Grasses should be cut at a height of 2 - 3 inches. Don't cut more than 1/3 of the grass blade off at any mowing. Turfgrasses mowed at taller heights help shade and cool the soil, which results in less water use and healthier lawns. It also prevents germination of weed seeds. Grasscycling is an excellent way to return nutrients to the lawn.

### WATERING

Deep watering is best so grass roots will grow as deeply into the soil as the water reaches. Roots will not grow from moist soil into dry soil. Lawn roots should grow at least six inches deep. Most lawns, however, are more shallow-rooted than this. Several hours after watering, check the soil with a probe or garden trowel to see how deeply the water has reached down into the root zone. Note how long it took for water to reach this level. Water again as needed to keep this root zone area moist. In heavier soils, this may mean leaving the sprinkler on for several hours every three or four days. Lighter, sandy soils may require shorter waterings every two to three days.

*(Continued on back page)*

## **AERATING**

Aerating reduces soil compaction and improves water penetration. First, water the lawn well. The following day, use a core aerator to remove plugs of soil. Aerators can be rented at most rental businesses. Plugs should be left on the lawn, as they will break down and add additional organic matter. Water afterwards to ensure that water penetrates to the depth of the core space. This is a good time to fertilize. If soil texture needs to be improved, apply 1/2 inch of compost or moistened peat moss and steer manure.

## **POWER RAKING**

Thatch is the spongy layer between blades of grass and soil. Thatch should not exceed 1/2 inch. Power rake lawns only when thatch interferes with water and fertilizer getting to the roots. Power rake in early spring. (For more information, refer to Extension Bulletin #1117, *Thatch and Its Control*) Power rakes, which are the size of heavy lawn mowers, are available for rent.

## **CHEMICAL WEED CONTROL**

Herbicides come in two formulations: a liquid spray or a granular form mixed with fertilizer (Weed 'n Feed). Be careful of herbicides containing the ingredient dicamba, which can damage nearby trees and shrubs. **READ THE LABEL.** Refer to Extension Bulletin #607, *Lawn Weed Control for Homeowners*, for application timing for specific weed problems.

## **COMMON LAWN PROBLEMS**

### Dry spots

Heavy foot traffic, hot, dry winds and heat can cause soil and thatch to become dry and compacted. Aerate with a machine or hand tools and use a wetting agent.

### Burn spots

Dog urine (female) - leach area with water.

Fertilizer burn - leach area with water.

Gas and oil spills - check lawn mowers for leaks. Don't refill tanks on lawn.

It may take a year or more for turf to recover from burns.

### Dull mower blades

Sharpen lawnmower blades every six weeks to prevent yellow, frayed grass blades.

### Weedy grasses

Quack grass, annual bluegrass, bentgrass and others may require treatment.

See *Weedy Grasses* publication.

### Sod webworm/lawn moths

Grubs feed on grass roots and crowns. Damage is seldom severe, but if grass blades are continually chewed off at base, use Sevin insecticides according to product labels.

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Compiled by Levi Strauss. For more information, contact Master Gardeners at (509) 477-2181.

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