

## Spring Lawn Activities

By

By Scott Hininger  
University of Wyoming  
Cooperative Extension Service  
Sheridan County  
4/20/2011

Now is the time to begin some of those spring activities we have been waiting for. We can start by core aerating the lawn after we have picked up all those tree branches and pruned the broken branches. Core aerating is an essential management tool for turf areas, especially those that have thatch or subject to high traffic or those heavy clay soils. Core aeration helps improve the root zone environment by relieving soil compaction while helping to control thatch accumulation. Plugs of thatch and soil two to three inches long are removed by the aerating machine and are left on the lawn surface. Go ahead and leave the cores on the surface of the lawn. It may take a few days to several weeks for the cores to disintegrate.

I do not recommend thatching or power raking a lawn. Generally, when this is done it leaves bare patches of ground and damages the grass crowns, which invites a place for weeds to grow and disease to start. If you want to remove, the brown dead grass in the lawn then set the mower down to a lower setting and that should take care of most of the dead grass. Thatch is the organic matter, which builds up above the soil. If the thatch accumulates to more than three fourths of an inch thick it will start to choke out grass and slow down the movement of water into the soil.

Now is the time to check mower blades for sharpness and proper adjustment. Experts say to sharpen rotary mower blades after every fourth mowing, especially when mowing fescue or ryegrass lawns, which have thicker leaf blades. A dull mower blade will shred and fray the leaf blades instead of cutting the blades cleanly. The result is a brown, tattered, unattractive lawn.

Now is also the time of year to start a fertilizer program. I recommend from two to four pounds of actual nitrogen per thousand square feet of yard per year. This is divided up into two to four applications of about one pound of actual nitrogen per thousand square feet of yard. Early spring after aerating is especially a good time to fertilize with a higher rate of phosphorous. Phosphorous is the second number listed on a bag of fertilizer. Phosphorous is not readily water-soluble and most of our soil test show we are short of this nutrient. By applying phosphorous or a high phosphorous fertilizer after aerating this allows some to fall into the holes and be more available for the roots of plants. By using less fertilizer, the grass will grow slower and will require less mowing. There is several very good slow release fertilizer products available, which mean you do not have to fertilize as often.

I have seen some winter drought injury along with freeze damage on some plants, most notably evergreens. Be on the watch for disease and insects on trees this spring. Also be on the lookout for weeds. Weeds are very easy to control this time of the year and most newer products for weed control are very effective and safe. If you are using chemicals, be

sure to read and follow the directions. If your plants had any kind of disease problems last year then as soon as they green up then a fungicide spray could be used. In addition, if you are going to use a systemic insecticide particularly one, which is to be watered into the soil, this can be done now.

The University of Wyoming and the United States Department of Agriculture, Sheridan county Office cooperate.