

Fall Lawn Care

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Proper fall lawn care for cool-season grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass and the fine and tall fescues is important to ensure a healthy lawn next spring.

Mowing height should be between 2 to 3 inches, and always be sure your mower is operating properly and that the blades are sharpened. If possible, mow with a mulching blade frequently, and let the clippings stay in the yard instead of bagging. Try not to remove more than one-third of the leaf material during each mowing. Your last mowing will usually occur sometime in late September or early October. The grass clippings this time of year work very well mixed with leaves to mulch in the garden.

Thatch is an accumulation of dead and decaying plant material that can accumulate just above the soil surface. If the thatch layer is greater than one-half to three-quarters of an inch, problems could occur. For severe thatch layers, core aeration may be needed. A machine can be rented for this procedure, or hire a local lawn maintenance company. Aeration really helps to alleviate compacted soils, and if you have heavy clay soils that have had some traffic on them this summer try aeration.

Turf grass needs about three to five pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year. The last fertilization of the season should occur in September to promote root growth. October generally is too late because a late surge of growth has been shown to make the grass more susceptible to winter injury and disease.

If your lawn is a little sparse try adding some grass seed. The fall is a good time to do that as the days are cooler and the roots will continue to grow until the grounds freezes up. Also if you wait till later the seed will stay dormant until spring. However, during the winter if we get a warm spell this new grass may need some additional water to make it through the winter.

This fall, irrigate your lawn as needed according to the weather. Try to water deeply and infrequently in the morning, this time of year generally one good watering per week is plenty. Do not irrigate so much at one time that water runs off. However, it is really important going into winter that all perennial plants, including grass, have adequate soil moisture to make it through the winter. Therefore, if you have turned off your sprinkler system you might still need to drag out a hose if we do not receive adequate fall moisture.

Autumn is also a good time to start thinking about weed control. Pre-emergent herbicides (those that work on emerging seeds) can be applied in the fall or late winter. Choose a product

that is labeled for your type of grass. Always read the label when applying pesticides, and use properly calibrated equipment. These can be very effective for annual weeds that sprout in the fall or early spring. Also those hard to control weeds are best controlled this time of year with a good herbicide.

The best defense against a turfgrass disease is to have a nice, healthy lawn. Chemical control can be useful if needed, but proper cultural practices can greatly reduce the need for chemicals. There are several companies which make fungicides for lawn use, when looking at the label look for "disease control" and follow the directions. Generally when there is a disease problem several applications are needed, and applying an application in the fall along with next spring will really help control most lawn disease problems.

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