

## LAWN CARE CALENDAR

Proper timing of fertilizing, mowing, watering, and dethatching are important parts of a sound cultural lawn maintenance program. The correct time for these practices is closely related to the stage of growth of the grass.

Let's take a look at turf growth. After the dormant winter period, grass begins to grow when the average maximum daily temperature is above fifty degrees. For our area this means that growth usually starts sometime in late March or April. The most rapid growth tends to occur when it's warm, 70 to 75 degrees, but not hot. This typically is during May and early June. Turf growth slows during the stress of hot mid-summer weather and picks up again in late summer as things cool down a bit. With cold weather, frost, and shorter days, grass growth drastically slows down in October and then goes dormant. Understanding the growth cycle of grass is important in helping us understand the best timing for our various lawn care practices.

### Mowing

Did you realize that proper mowing is one of the most crucial factors in the overall quality of your lawn? Lawns should be mowed regularly. When you don't mow often enough you're weakening the lawn by "scalping" it. "Scalping" occurs when more than one third of the leaf blade is removed at one time. A overall browning of the lawn will follow a "scalping."

Scalping causes the grass plant to use up its carbohydrate reserves as it regrows. This loss of energy results in weaker grass plants and a thinning of the lawn. Lawns which are frequently scalped will become less dense and less able to compete with weeds. In hot weather, severe scalping may also lead to irregular areas of the lawn dying.

Proper mowing height and a sharp mower blade are critical in mowing your lawn properly. Mow bluegrass lawns and mixes of bluegrass, fine fescue, and perennial ryegrass at a height of 2 to 2.5 inches. A dull mower blade bruises and frays grass blades. This results in a white cast to the lawn after mowing. Reel-type mowers with sharp blades give the cleanest cut. Rotary mower blades should be sharpened frequently...after every third or fourth mowing. This is easiest to do if you have an extra blade sharpened for use when the blade needs changing.

Grass clippings should be left on the lawn. They don't contribute appreciably to thatch and they do have significant value as a fertilizer. According to lawn experts a season's worth of grass clipping, finely chopped and distributed over a lawn, equals at least one fertilizer application if not more. By leaving the grass clippings on the lawn, you won't need to fertilize as much as you would with their removal.

The new mulching mowers do an excellent job of chopping up the leaf blade and returning it to the lawn, especially if bad weather or a vacation has meant that you missed a mowing. Mulching mowers also tend to give a more manicured look to lawns than conventional mowers. However, conventional mowers which discharge their clipping back onto the lawn are just fine if you are mowing frequently enough to follow the rule of removing no more than one-third of the leaf blade at one time.

If you are mowing frequently enough, you won't have unsightly messy clumps of grass that need raking. If you do have clippings that remain visible more than one day, rake the clippings up, put them in the compost pile, and be sure to mow more often!

What should you do if your mower breaks down, or poor weather, or a vacation result in very tall grass? It's very tempting to mow right away to the normal recommended height, but this will lead to scalping when you remove more than one third of the leaf blade. You can avoid scalping by gradually reducing the height of the grass. For example.....if the grass has reached a height of six inches, mow first at four inches, several days later mow again at three inches, and then several days later mow it at the recommended height.

You'll get the best results with your regular mowing, if you vary your mowing pattern. If you always mow in the same direction, grass blades can develop a lean that results in spikes of uncut grass. Using the exact same pattern can also lead to ruts and compacted soil from mower wheel tracks. Mow in a different direction each time. Overlap your mowing paths by about four inches for a uniform cut. When possible, turn on driveways and sidewalks to minimize tire scuffing.

## **Fertilizing**

Fertilizer is not the most critical factor in a healthy lawn but, it definitely does contribute to the quality and density of the turf. Fertilization also correlates with the growth of the grass. The first fertilization of the growing season coincides with the rapid growth of the grass in May. A second application goes on in late June, another in September, and another in early November. Fertilizer applied too early in the spring will stimulate top growth at the expense of root growth.

Apply fertilizer at the rate of one pound of nitrogen per one thousand square feet. You'll get the best performance from your fertilizer and more even growth with a mix of quick and slow-release nitrogen. Look for a fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio.

## **Thatch Removal**

If thatch is a problem, dethatching is best done in the spring before hot weather slows growth and stresses the grass. The prime time to dethatch is in March. It's usually best to dethatch before the middle of April. If you don't realize that you have a thatch problem until mid-summer, dethatching can be done after the hot weather passes in September.

## **Aeration or Aerifying**

Aeration can be done at almost any time of year. Hollow-tined aeration is primarily done to reduce soil compaction. By reducing soil compaction, aerification increases soil oxygen, improves water penetration, increases movement of fertilizer into the soil, and helps reduce thatch. While it does assist in reducing thatch, it's not a remedy for a thatch problem.

## **Crabgrass Control**

Crabgrass is an annual grass. It's most easily controlled with herbicides that prevent its seed from germinating in the spring. To be effective the herbicides must be applied before the seed germinates. Applications of "crabgrass preventers" are usually made sometime in March and April. The best time for application is when forsythia (the shrub that blooms in early spring with yellow flowers) has been in bloom for a week or more.

## **Broadleaf Weed Control**

Your best defense against broadleaf weeds (dandelion, clover, plantain, etc.) is a thick, healthy turf. Control of broadleaf weed problems can be accomplished with the help of herbicides. These are used most effectively from May to mid-June and again in September to early October. Proper mowing,

watering, and fertilizing will also help prevent weeds from becoming a problem.

***For answers to your questions about lawn care, call the WSU Extension office at 735-3551.***

## **LAWN CARE CALENDAR**

### **December-January**

Avoid piling snow on turf areas, stay off frozen grass.

### **February**

Stay off muddy grass areas. When not muddy, gently rake lawn to remove debris.

### **March**

Mow (0-2 times a month)  
Annual Grass Pre-emergent Control  
Dethatch

### **April**

Mow (4 times a month)

### **May**

Mow (4-6 times a month)  
Fertilize  
Broad-leaved Weed Control

### **June**

Mow (4-6 times a month)  
Fertilize

### **July**

Mow (4 times a month)

### **August**

Mow (4 times a month)

### **September**

Mow (4 times a month)  
Fertilize early in month  
Broadleaved Weed Control

### **October**

Mow (2-3 times a month)

### **November**

Fertilize early in month

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