

Lawn Maintenance



HGA-00334



A well established lawn is a valuable asset to any home but it cannot remain that way without a certain amount of regular maintenance. Grass is a perennial plant that must have a complete growth environment if it is to successfully grow and maintain itself and store food for overwintering.

A grass plant has many factors operating against it in its struggle for survival. Included are weeds, disease, winter damage, soil compaction, moisture stress, and nutrient stress. Effective lawn maintenance includes all activities which can reduce or eliminate these stress factors.

Fertilizing & Liming

Fertility management is an important part of maintaining a healthy lawn. Adequate amounts of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium are important in leaf growth, root development and disease resistance. During lawn establishment a complete analysis fertilizer should be incorporated into the soil to meet initial nutrient demands. The nutrient ratio as well as the total amount added should be determined through soil testing. Initial incorporation of lime is also based on soil testing.

Maintenance applications of fertilizer and lime should be based on soil test results. Grass requires nitrogen for leaf blade growth but much of it can be lost from the soil through leaching after heavy rain or excessive irrigation. Phosphorous and potassium are attracted to and held by clay and organic matter in the soil. Movement of phosphorus and potassium through most soils is slow. It is very important to incorporate them into the soil during initial lawn establishment. Subsequent applications of fertilizer should be aimed primarily at: 1) resupplying adequate amounts of nitrogen lost through grass growth, mowing and removal and other factors, and 2) maintaining adequate levels of phosphorous, potassium and other essential elements. This can be done by applying a

complete fertilizer such as 10-20-10, 8-32-16 or 16-16-16 as soon as growth starts in the spring at a rate of 6 to 7 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Later applications of a high nitrogen fertilizer such as ammonium nitrate (34-0-0), urea (46-0-0) or 22-4-4 are used to insure continued leaf growth throughout the growing season. Recent Alaska based research indicates that late summer or fall applications of nitrogen may allow grass to increase winter hardiness and to green-up earlier in the spring. If lime is needed for reestablishing the proper pH it should be added in late fall or very early spring. Use several light applications rather than one heavy application if a large amount is needed. Maintaining a pH of 6.0 is very adequate for most turf grasses.

Weeds

Weed problems do occur in many lawns and often become established when the weed outcompetes the grass. Maintaining a thick, healthy stand of grass is the best method of weed prevention. Physical removal or the use of appropriate herbicides may be necessary to eliminate more extensive weed problems. A compact soil or one that has been subjected to heavy pedestrian or vehicular traffic results in weeds rather than grass having the growth advantage.

Herbicides

Herbicides for lawn weed control can be found at your local garden supply store. Most are selective against broad leaf plants. This requires extreme care when using these products around ornamentals, trees, flower beds and greenhouses. Prevent spray drift into garden areas and onto adjoining property. Weed and feed fertilizers can also cause damage to flowers, shrubs, and trees.

Watering

Watering should be based on soil texture, weather and plant growth rate. If the soil dries out, the lawn should receive sufficient water to moisten the top 2 to 3 inches of soil. Water is important for all life processes and water stress can impair the overall health and growth of your lawn. Water availability is especially important for healthy root growth. An application of up to 1" of water per week may be necessary during dry summer weather.

Mowing

Mowing is important in insuring that a lawn maintains a neat, groomed appearance. It also affects the growth and health of the lawn. Grass should be maintained at a height of 2 to 2½ inches. It should not be allowed to grow too tall between cuttings because it takes longer for the plant to recover when all of the leaf blade or the majority of it is removed. Mowing should remove no more than one-third to one-half of the leaf blade surface at any one time.

Thatch

Under Alaska's cool growing conditions, grass clippings may accumulate in a lawn faster than they can decompose. When this happens, a layer of thatch builds up which can insulate the soil, contribute to potential disease problems, and increase drought and winter damage susceptibility because new grass plants grow in the thatch layer rather than in the soil. A mulching lawn mower increases surface area and decomposition rate of the grass clippings but they may still accumulate and create thatch under certain conditions.

Lawn Repair

There are occasions when portions of the lawn may decline or die-out due to weather, disease, or soil conditions. If the areas are small they can often be overseeded with a suitable variety or mix. Prior to seeding, the areas should be prepared. Dead grass and thatch can be removed with a rake. The soil surface can then be raked to allow for good soil to seed contact. A thin layer of soil or sand may also be put down to create a new seedbed. New commercial products that combine a fibrous mulch and grass seed can simplify this process.

If extensive areas of the lawn die, it may indicate that the grass variety is not suitable for that site. The entire lawn may have to be tilled and prepared for reseeding with a different variety of grass. Other options include hydro-seeding or sodding.

*A well maintained lawn reflects the pride and dedication of the owner.
You are the key to bringing about that result.*