

The timing of work in one's yard is almost as important as the amount of time spent working in one's yard. The window of opportunity for most gardening tasks remains open for a brief time. Many yard care chores need to be accomplished in the month of April. If not completed, they shift to next year's plan.

I recommend two lawn care tasks while temperatures remain somewhat cool and before turfgrass completely breaks dormancy. One is thoroughly cleaning the lawn, and the second is aerating. Complete both by mid-April. Note: if one aerated in the fall, there is no need to do it again this spring.

Cleaning the lawn area helps to stimulate new growth and remove unwanted dead turf and debris. Raking and mowing are the two common ways to clean a lawn. I prefer hand raking to power raking. I am not an advocate of power raking a lawn unless it has an excessive amount of thatch. Thatch is a layer of dead and decaying tissue located between the green vegetation and the soil. Thatch increases the turf's resiliency for wear as well as insulates it against soil temperature changes. Power raking does effectively remove thatch; however, it can also cause serious injury to the plant crown and to the roots of living turf. When mowing, avoid cutting too short or scalping which also can cause injury to the crown.

Aerating (core cultivation) is a lawn care procedure I recommend at least every other year. This procedure also helps to eliminate thatch accumulation, but more importantly, it relieves soil compaction. An aerating machine punches holes in the sod and, at the same time, removes small plugs of sod. The holes allow for better delivery of water and fertilizer to the root zone promoting the exchange of oxygen and air to the soil.

Once raking and aerating are finished, a complete fertilizer application should be done; however, it is best to wait with this task until the latter part of April.

If one's lawn has excessive broad leaf weeds, such as dandelions, one can apply a post-emergent herbicide such as 2,4-D. Use with caution. Herbicides such as 2, 4-D are highly volatile and in the spring if not carefully applied can cause extensive harm to other desirable broadleaf ornamentals.

April is also the time when a pre-emergent herbicide to control crab grass germination should be applied. Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine when the exact time to apply this product occurs. One should not apply this product until soil temperatures reach a minimum of 55° F. This normally occurs more toward the end of April and sometimes not until early May.

Note: after an application of fertilizer and/or pre-emergent herbicide, irrigate the lawn with at least one-half inch of water. Most pre-emergent herbicide failures are often attributed to the product not being watered in. Always read all herbicide labels and follow directions explicitly.

Early April is also an opportune time to prepare perennial flower borders and a perfect time to divide perennials. Dividing perennials is simply using one parent plant to produce several smaller ones. Dividing is an excellent way to expand your flower border. The roots of many perennials are fibrous. A flat spade is useful to slice clumps of fibrous roots into halves or quarters. I often find it easier to dig the entire plant before dividing, and then to plant the divisions. Always plant the divisions at the same depth as the original plant.

Dig, divide and transplant divisions on a cloudy day or in the cool hours of the day. It is best to divide perennials a few days following a rain or after watering. Some plants easily divided are ajuga, asters, astilbe, beebalm, rudbeckia, chrysanthemum, columbine, coneflower, daylily, lamb's ear, peony, phlox, sedum, vinca and yarrow.

With three more weeks in the month of April, the window of opportunity remains open; however, time is of essence. Better get moving; the clock is ticking!