



Winter can be a beautiful time of the year. The gracefully falling snow or frost on the plants in the morning sun can be an attractive sight to some. To others, it just means more work outside. Regardless of how you feel, these winter conditions should remind everyone to think about their turf. That's right, I said turf. While the frost and snow are pretty, there are some steps that you can take now to ensure a beautiful looking lawn come spring.

Frost can do more than cause you to scrape your windshield. Walking or driving across frozen turf may seem safe enough, but it can actually cause damage to the lawn which will be visible come spring. When the grass blades freeze, they become brittle. There are many theories as to how the frost damages the living turf tissues, but the most common belief is that the ice crystals damage the plants' cells when they are forced into the leaf by the weight of a foot or wheel. Early morning dog walkers, newspaper deliverers, golfers, or joggers can do significant cosmetic damage on frosted turf. If done repeatedly, this could mean reseeding the area come spring.

It is fairly easy to spot the depressed footprints in the frosted turf, but once the frost melts the damage has a little different appearance. The damage to the frozen turf first appears as a blackening of the leaves which gradually turns to a brown or tan color. There is some good news though. In the spring, turf suffering from damage due to foot traffic while frozen will normally recover after two to four mowings.

Snow on turf can be both a blessing and a curse. A blanket of snow across the turf can help to protect it from the harsh winter winds and help to insulate it from the freezing temperatures. Leave as much snow on turf as possible to act as an insulating layer. Snow can also cause damage to lawns. If the melting water refreezes around the roots of the plant it can kill the crowns of the turfgrass. When scooping, avoid making large piles of snow on the turf. Try to spread the snow around to disperse the snow's weight and the concentration of deicers, if used. This can help reduce the potential for issues down the road related to deicer damage or slow melting snow piles. Snow that has fallen naturally isn't as dense and compacted as shoveled snow and can be left alone.

Building a snowman is another fun snow-time activity that could also influence your turf. The densely packed balls of snow melt slower than the rest of the snow on the ground. After a warm spell just Frosty remains. These remnants of a fun afternoon could also cause damage due to the weight of the heavily compacted snow and the slower melting of the large snowballs. To avoid Frosty's revenge, break up the snowballs left by the snowman as the temperatures warm up and the surrounding snow begins to melt. Don't forget to pick up any leftover snowman accessories left on the turf like scarves, hats, or large rock buttons before they are forgotten.

Snow can also lead to issues with snow mold fungus. The most common snow molds are gray or pink snow mold. They look like circular, patches of pinkish or grayish mold on the turf surface, followed by tan patches. Gray snow mold is most likely to develop in areas where snow has been piled. Pink snow mold needs cool temperatures and high moisture to get started, not necessarily under patches lingering snow. Normally curative fungicide treatments aren't needed for turf to recover. If needed, the area can be raked to disturb the mat of fungi, then reseeded in the spring.

Take precautions now with these winter-time activities to keep your lawns looking their best into the new year.

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