

When it comes to yard work, timing is everything! I often say, “It’s not the amount of time you spend working in your yard that determines its success; rather, it’s the timing of your work in the yard that determines success.” Most gardening tasks need to be accomplished within a window of limited time. If not accomplished in a timely fashion, those tasks go on hold until the following year.

Mid-April has arrived and with it warmer days, cool nights and the promise of April Showers. It is time to address turfgrass. The window of opportunity is now wide-open for two turfgrass tasks. Such tasks should be finished before month’s end. They are cleaning the lawn and aeration. Allow me to address each.

Following the ravages of winter, turfgrass is often matted from the weight of snow and an accumulation of dead grass, leaves and other dead organic matter. It is time to remove that debris, thus maximizing the grass to sunlight exposure. This healthy environmental practice stimulates new growth in turfgrass.

One can remove debris in a number of ways. One method is to rake the lawn and remove the excess dead grass and debris by hand. Alternatively, one can use a power rake. Using a power rake involves less physical labor and often does a better job of lifting and removing excess accumulations of thatch. If there is not a major accumulation of debris buildup, one can also easily remove it by running a mower over the lawn and catching the clippings. When mowing, avoid scalping—cutting the turfgrass shorter than one inch in length. Scalping causes injury to the crown of a grass plant and can all too often result in death. Once the turfgrass is actively growing, raise the mower to a minimum of two and one-half inches. One catch phrase is, “Set and forget!” Another standard rule of thumb involving mowing is, “Avoid removing more than one third of the top growth of turfgrass at any one mowing.”

Many soils have high clay and silt content. These soils are prone to compaction when exposed to foot traffic, irrigation and rainfall. Soil compaction reduces turfgrass quality, growth and vigor. One should consider aerating at least once every two years to improve water, air, and nutrient penetration. One should core aerate when the turfgrass is actively growing to enhance recovery and maximize root growth response. From now until the end of the month is an opportune time to aerate. A power aerator is the quickest and most efficient way to aerate the

lawn. You can hire this service done or simply rent an aerating machine from your local garden center and do it yourself. One word of caution — if you have an underground irrigation system, flag all sprinkler heads to avoid damaging them with the aerator. After aerating, any soil cores left lying on the surface of the lawn can easily be pulverized by running the lawn mower over them.

Although one would think that now is also the opportune time to fertilize and apply pre-emergence treatment for crab grass control, these tasks should be delayed a few more weeks. The UNL turf department recommends fertilizing near the end of April and applying a pre-emergence treatment for crab grass no sooner than May 1 or when soil temperatures reach 55°F. Perhaps more about that in a future article.

Let's face it. Addressing each window of opportunity when it opens is the key. If one can accomplish cleaning, raking, mowing and aeration of the lawn now, I say, "Job well done." However, do not rest long for other windows will soon be opening. Remember, timing is everything!