

Spring Lawn care

The days in the late winter and early spring that tend to get warm for a few days in a row typically get all of us excited for yard preparations for the pending spring and summer. We should wait to fully begin cleaning up our yards for the spring season. March 20th through April 20th is the best time to start getting our yards ready for spring. It is at this time in the early spring that we should mow our lawns to a short length of 1.5-2" long, this is done to remove all the leaves and debris that has gotten into our lawns over the fall and winter. The shorter length also allows for the sun to get through to the soil to warm it up sooner so that the turf plants can begin to grow sooner. After the first, shorter, mowing period, we should mow our lawns longer. We should mow them to a height of 2" or taller for Kentucky bluegrass and 2.5-3" for tall fescue. Remember, we should only mow off 1/3 of the grass each time that we mow, so we may need to mow more often to accomplish this.

It is up to you if you would like to leave the grass clippings on the lawn or if you would like to remove them. However, if you return the clippings back to the turf, it will add up to 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet over the course of the growing season. This can aid in the amount of fertilization you may need to apply to your yard and help it look greener through the growing season.

As for the fertilization, this should also wait until later in the spring. It is recommended to add 1.0 pound of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet between April 20th and May 10th. This fertilization should be done with a slow release fertilizer of your choosing. Fertilization of Kentucky bluegrass should be applied in mid to late June, the beginning of September, and late October. To make this easier to remember, fertilizer treatments should be done on tax day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and Halloween. As for tall fescue lawns, these should only be fertilized two times a year, in the early spring and late fall. We should avoid fertilization during the hot summer months. The spring fertilization can be done in combination with a pre-emergent herbicide that will combat crabgrass, foxtail, and goosegrass. Dandelion and other winter annual weeds can be treated in May but the best treatment time is in the fall for better control.

Aeration may also be used to improve the health of your lawn. Aeration is the process that uses a machine to either slice the soil surface or pull cores out of the soil surface. This process is done to reduce the compaction of the soil increasing the amount of oxygen in the soil and allowing for more water penetration on the soil surface. Aeration also helps to reduce the thatch layer that can develop on the soil surface. Thatch is an area of dead and decaying grass stems, leaves, and roots that is located between the soil surface and the green top growth. If too much of a thatch layer develops, then water and sunlight cannot penetrate through this layer and get to the soil. A thatch layer is beneficial to protect the grass roots from weather extremes but it should be only 1" or less. Aeration should be done in the spring or fall when the turf can recover quickly, so this is the time of year you should be finding a company to aerate your lawn, if necessary.

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