



Maintaining and Rejuvenating Your Lawn

*Fall is an ideal time to take a good look at your lawn.
Assess its condition, its needs, and its impact on the environment.*

Key Questions:

#1. Do I have the right grass for my site?

If you bought grass seed at a lawn and garden retail center, chances are that you don't have the best grass for your site. Why? Because most inexpensive seed mixes are made up of generic grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, and perennial ryegrass.

The best grasses are newly developed, named cultivars. They cost a bit more and are most commonly sold at nurseries. '**Limousine**' bluegrass, '**Crossfire**' fescue, and '**Brightstar**' ryegrass are examples.

- '**Limousine**' bluegrass has great resistance to leaf spot fungus and other diseases. It holds up well in high-traffic areas.
- '**Crossfire**' is a dwarf fescue, highly heat and drought tolerant, deep rooted, and has a low-fertility requirement.
- '**Brightstar**' ryegrass is an endophyte (contains a beneficial fungus) which resists many insects, diseases, and environmental stresses.

#2. Do I need to change my lawn maintenance routine?

- If you aren't leaving **grass clippings** on your lawn, you are wasting a valuable resource. Grass clippings can supply up to 30% of the fertilizer needs of your lawn. Clippings break down fastest when they are very small. Use a mulching mower or add a mulching blade to a conventional rotary mower.
- If you aren't **watering deeply** to promote deep rooting, your lawn is unprepared for handling stress. Heat, drought, wear, insects, and disease cause stress. Deep rooting makes it easier for lawns to recover.
- If you aren't checking for **thatch build-up** and removing thick layers of thatch, you are putting your lawn's health at risk. Thatch resists water penetration, promotes shallow-rooting, and encourages insect and disease problems. Thatch is a natural accumulation of dead roots, stems, stolons, and rhizomes. When it is thicker than 1/2 inch, it must be removed. A first-rate lawn maintenance program prevents thick thatch from developing. Shallow watering and over-fertilizing cause the problem.
- If you have clay soil and do not **aerate your lawn** every few years, the soil is compacted and lacks oxygen necessary for a healthy lawn. Roots need air to grow. Also, beneficial soil microorganisms need air to live, to break down thatch, and to convert nutrients into usable forms for the lawn. Rent a power aerator to lift out plugs (or cores) of soil; rake the plugs to break them up; top dress with a 1/4 inch layer of fine compost.

#3. Should I use a weed-and-feed product?

Although weed-and-feed products are widely available at garden centers, they don't offer the best care for your lawn. Why? All lawns are different. Different types of grasses require different rates of fertilization and have different levels of weed infestation.

- **Over-fertilization** is the greatest cause of lawn disease. Too much nitrogen can alter the soil pH, kill beneficial microbes, and create an environment favorable to insects and diseases.
- Blanket application of herbicides is wasteful and dangerous. **2,4-D is known to kill** pets. Applying it to an entire lawn when weeds grow in limited areas makes no sense.
- Many lawn **weed problems cannot be controlled** by weed-and-feed products. Check the label to see what weeds are affected. Crabgrass and other narrow-leaved weeds are not usually controlled. Pre-emergents must be used in late winter or very early spring to prevent crabgrass seeds from germinating.

#4. What are some "Good Sense" approaches to lawn care?

Be willing to change lawn-care habits and old ideas. First of all, cut back on fast-release nitrogen fertilizers. Besides promoting diseases, excess nitrogen leaches out of the soil and pollutes ground water. Use slow-release, organic products that support soil microbial life.

- In spring and fall, apply only the **minimum amount of fertilizer** that your lawn needs.
- Buy a **hand-weeding tool** for lifting out small weeds and a weed popper to tackle tougher, deeper rooted weeds. Spot spray weeds that are impossible to remove.
- Over-seed thin areas to keep turf dense. Dense turf helps **prevent weed growth**.
- Use a trowel or screw driver to check for **water penetration** levels. The soil should be moist 6-8 inches beneath the surface. Allow the soil to dry out in the top 2-3 inches before re-watering.

PROTECT YOUR LAWN in the WET SEASON

- Stay off wet lawns
- Rake up leaves and debris
- Use a slow-release nitrogen fertilizer
- Bag clippings until the weather is warm

A Question of Water Use

Lawns can use more water than swimming pools. If your lawn is larger than 1,000 sq. ft., you may want to evaluate its very existence. A water-hungry lawn can be replaced with a more environmentally friendly grass type and become a drought-tolerant lawn .

PROBLEMS???

- Too much shade?
try a fine fescue
- Pet-damaged turf?
add new soil; re-seed
- Torn-up areas?
skunks dig up grubs
- Beige, ragged tips?
sharpen mower
- Weed-like grass?
poor quality seed