
LONG TERM LAWN CARE AND MAINTENANCE

Three Steps for a Healthy Lawn:

1. Fertilize
 2. Water
 3. Mow
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SPRING

- Prepare to activate the sprinkler system. Call us at Bears Landscaping 719.395.6737 and we will turn it on and do a complete system check as well as perform any needed repairs.
- This is a good time to aerate. Aeration removes plugs of thatch and soil 2 to 3 inches long (the longer, the better) and deposits them on the lawn. A single aeration using a machine with 1/2-inch diameter tines removes about 10 percent of the thatch if enough passes are made to achieve an average 2-inch spacing between holes.

Disposing of the cores is a matter of personal choice. From a cultural perspective, there may be an advantage to allowing the cores to disintegrate and filter back down into the lawn. Mingling soil and thatch may hasten the natural decomposition of the thatch. The little fluffs of thatch and turf that remain can be collected and composted.

- *FERTILIZE.* The best time to fertilize your lawn is in the spring, when the soil temperature reaches around 50 degrees Fahrenheit which is when the lilacs start blooming and the grass starts growing.

When you buy fertilizer, you'll see three numbers on the label. These numbers show the percentage of nitrogen, phosphate, and potassium, respectively, which are the primary nutrients needed to feed your lawn. We recommend a weed and feed product of 25-3-3. This is a vital time for your lawn to get nutrients and water to bring it out of dormancy. Weed and Feed will kill dandelions and other major lawn weeds. It helps build strong and deep roots. Slow-release fertilizers break down their nutrients over a longer period of time, so you can wait longer between applications. Homeowners should use granules, rather than spraying, and apply them with a spreader. Granular fertilizer is very easy to apply accurately.



As stated before, the first feeding of fertilizer in the spring, or May, should be when the soil temperature reaches appx. 50°F. The second feeding should be around mid-July. The third feeding should be in mid-September. We recommend using a *Scott WinterGuard Fall Lawn Food*.

Contrary to what some people think, the more you water your lawn, the more fertilizer it needs. With more water, there is more growth, so you need more fertilizer. As the grass grows, it uses more nutrients. If you have a sprinkler system, you'll need to fertilize about every six weeks. Without a sprinkler, you can wait another two weeks between feedings.

Be sure to read what the fertilizer label says regarding watering before or after the application. Granules need moisture to break down, and some fertilizers require you to wet the lawn with about a quarter-inch of water before applying them.

The fertilizer label will give you the application rate. But don't follow it. Start out at half of what's recommended on the bag. Spread the fertilizer at about half the recommended rate, or slightly less, in one direction on the lawn, then spread it again at half the rate in a perpendicular direction. This pattern gives better coverage and helps prevent over-applying. Too little is better than too much.

SUMMER

- **WATER.** The most efficient time of day to water is late evening and early morning (between 10 p.m. and midnight or 8 and 9 a.m.). It generally is less windy, cooler and more humid at this time, resulting in less evaporation and more efficient use of water. Water pressure is generally better and this results in optimal distribution patterns. Contrary to popular belief, watering at night does not encourage disease development.

A good rule of thumb for watering an established lawn is to water as deeply and as infrequently as possible. Deep and infrequent watering stimulates root growth, resulting in healthy, drought tolerant, and pest resistant grass. See the attached *Fact Sheet from CSU Extension "Watering Established Lawns"* for more in-depth watering information.

- **MOW.** Mow as the yard needs it and keep grass length to about 2½ to 3 inches. When mowing, never remove more than ⅓ of the grass blade. Cutting off too much of the blade puts the yard under a great deal of extra stress.

FALL

- Fall is a key time for lawn health; ignoring it puts your grass at risk not only for the winter months but also for the following spring.
- While mowing isn't needed as frequently during fall, the turf *DOES* continue to grow – but in ways that differ from spring and summer. Turfgrasses form tillers (side shoots) and rhizomes that increase the density of fall turf. This is an important time for turf to “heal” after a stressful summer, especially if it has been worn down by traffic or suffered from disease or insect problems.
- Fall watering is essential for late season nitrogen applications to work most effectively. Fertilizer applied to dry turf is less likely to enhance fall rooting and increase energy storage. Be sure to water in fall fertilizer applications, often considered the most important application of the year.
- Fall is also the time to get rid of weeds. The weeds that hardened off during the heat of summer are opening up more and are easier to kill. Destroying them now, all the way down to the root level, means fewer weeds next year.

WINTER

- Winter watering may not be necessary for established lawns. However, lawns started within the last year are especially susceptible to winter desiccation injury (extreme dryness) and need supplemental winter irrigation. Areas of Colorado which experience open, dry winters are more susceptible to winter grass mites and desiccation if occasional winter irrigation is not applied.
- See the attached *Fact Sheet “Fall and Winter Watering”* from CSU Extension for more extensive information.