



Spring Lawn Care

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

As days grow longer and warmer temperatures move in, it is time to think about spring lawn care. Not surprisingly, we get a large number of lawn questions every year. Some folks are content to just have a green 'lawn' regardless of the other plants in the lawn aside from turfgrasses and others want that perfect carpet of only cool season grasses.

A great-looking lawn does require a fair amount of work. We always advise starting with a soil test. (Do keep in mind that spring is the busiest at the UConn Soil Nutrient Analysis Lab). The results will let you know the soil pH and nutrient levels. Recommendations will be made for how much limestone, if any is needed to bring your soil up to the optimum pH for lawns, which is in the mid 6s. Without a soil test, most lawns would benefit from 50 pounds of limestone per 1000 square feet every other year to maintain the pH at the preferred level.

Since about 2013, any lawn maintenance fertilizers sold in Connecticut do not contain any phosphorus. Legislation was passed to remove this nutrient as it is the number one cause for inland freshwater pollution. In a nutshell, the law says that established lawns should not be fertilized with phosphorus unless a soil test performed within the last 2 years makes a phosphorus recommendation. Fertilizers containing phosphorus, however, can be used when seeding, sodding or overseeding.



Photo by dmp, 2019

Spring fertilization should be done when the lawn begins active growth. This may be from mid-April to mid-May depending on where you are located and spring weather. Check your spreader settings to make sure that the correct amount of fertilizer is being applied.

The only weed control that should be applied in early spring is a crabgrass preventer. Typically, it would be applied when the forsythia is in full bloom. There are several formulations of crabgrass preventer that are sold. If doing any reseeding, make sure the one you pick will not inhibit your grass seed from germinating.

Spring is a great time to seed any bare spots while late summer is best for a more complete lawn renovation. Select a grass seed mix of Kentucky bluegrass, fescues, and ryegrass for sunny lawn areas. In partially shaded spots, fescues will do best.

Scratch up the soil surface, scatter the seed at the recommended rate and water in lightly. Some like to purchase a seed mix that contains a paper mulch while others opt for some tack straw to lightly cover the seed.

It is important that the seed stay slightly moist but avoid saturating the area. During cool spring weather, one might have to lightly water only once a day or every other day. If temperatures start to climb and there is no natural precipitation, more frequent waterings will be necessary. Once the seed germinates, continue watering during dry periods but less frequently. Usually, an irrigation once a week to a depth of 3 to 4 inches is sufficient to keep either new or established lawns stay green and healthy.

Make sure your lawn mower and weed whacker are in good working order. Sharp blades give your lawn a crisp look and also reduce disease incidence. Mowing to a height of 3 inches not only leaves longer blades for greater photosynthesis but also shades out many weed seeds inhibiting germination and weed growth.

Wait until June for any broad-leaved weed control applications. Some unwanted plants, such as dandelions, can be removed by hand-weeding. Others can be discouraged by mowing high and reseeding any bare spots. Do keep in mind that our pollinators appreciate you leaving some flowering plants in your lawns.

If you have lawn care questions or on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.homegarden.cahnrc.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.

