

Lawn Care Facts

by David Bayer UWEX Outagamie Co.

1. Mowing:

The most important cultural practice associated with turf care is proper mowing. Mow high (3 inches) during the spring and summer months when grass reaches 4 inches. Mow as late in fall as grass grows. Mow shorter in late October through the last mowing so as to prevent snow mold in early spring. Use mulching mower attachments to mulch fallen leaves into the turf is an approved cultural practice. It will not harm the turf and will recycle nutrients back to the trees from where they came. Sharpen the mower blade annually.

2. Fertilizing:

- A. A fertility program is based on personal preferences for the desired lawn quality.
- B. Apply no more than one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet at each application. One-half of this rate is all that is needed in shaded areas.
- C. Demand for nitrogen is higher than the other nutrient elements. Phosphorus should be as low a percentage as available. Zero phosphate fertilizer are highly encouraged for lakeshore lawns to minimize phosphorus pollution of the your lake. Never fertilize in April through early May.
- D. Use an annual fertilizer schedule based on your personal need.

Need	Times Applied	Dates	Approx. Formula
Minimum Maintenance	One Time	Late October	26-3-12 (winterizer)
General Maintenance	Two Times	Late October Early June	26-3-12 (winterizer) 26-3-3
High Maintenance	Three Times	Late October Early June Early September	26-3-12 (winterizer) 26-3-3 26-3-3

Expect to use more fertilizer if clippings are collected and the lawn is regularly irrigated. There is no good reason to bag clippings other than that of turf that has grown too long between mowing.

Never use lime on turf grasses grown on clay soil. Clay soils are already too alkaline.

3. Irrigation

When lawn grass turns a darker green and foot prints can be seen in the turf, it is water stressed. To remain green and growing, irrigate at this stage. Water lawn grasses one inch per week (including rain fall). Avoid light sprinkling. It promotes shallow root growth. Since browning of lawn grass only puts the turf into dormancy, watering is not necessary to keep the turf alive. Do it right or don't water at all. Extreme heat and drought however, can damage turf to a point where it will need reseeding.

4. Weed Control

- A. The best weed control is setting the mower at three inches or more.
- B. The most effective time to use herbicides is late September. This is when dandelions are mature. Treat them in September and they will not be there in spring. Herbicides can also be effective in early May.
- C. The best time for herbicides is not the best time to fertilizer. Using fertilizers at a different time and separately from herbicides is therefore advised. Spot treating individual weed plants is more economic and environmentally wise. Do not apply at any other rate higher than the labeled instructions. The most effective herbicide formulation includes 2-4-D, mecoprop and dicamba. This mixed product is know as a Trimec. Most lawn herbicide brands are this formulation.
- D. For Crabgrass control apply a pre-emergence crabgrass herbicide (*without fertilizer*) in late April or when the Forsythia shrub displays its full, bright yellow bloom.

David Bayer, Seasonal Horticulture
UW-Extension, Outagamie County
3365 W Brewster St., Appleton, WI 54914

Telephone: (920) 832-5119
e-mail: david.bayer@ces.uwex.edu
Web Site: www.co.outagamie.wi.us/uwex
Publications Web Site: http://cecommerce.uwex.edu

5. Thatch

Thatch is a layer of dead, undecayed grass stems (rhizomes) in the upper soil layer. Some thatch is desirable (up to ½ inch). Excessive thatch (more than ½ inch) is associated with an increase of disease and will restrict the movement of water, air and nutrients. Returning grass clippings to the turf does not contribute to thatch. Early spring fertilization (April & May), fertilizing four times a year, over watering and pesticide use contributes to thatch. Core aeration in the months of May or September when the turf is actively growing reduces thatch build up. Excess thatch cultures several turf diseases.

6. Disease

There are about 15 separate lawn diseases that are caused by parasitic fungi. These turf diseases need professional diagnosis and treatment recommendations. Turf samples can be brought into the County Extension Office to be sent to the Turf Grass Diagnostic Lab in Madison. The cost of the service through the UW Extension is \$20. An 8-inch square sample of sod that includes a transition between the healthy and disease sod is needed for diagnosis. Curative treatment almost always involves changing cultural practices such as core aeration and the right timing for fertilization. Lawn fungicides have proven ineffective.

7. Insects

There are two primary insects that can damage turf. June Beetle larva (white grubs) feed below ground on the roots. Chinch Bugs feed by sucking plant fluids at the crown of the grass. To monitor for insect infestation, mix one tablespoon of liquid soap with one gallon of water. Pour over a square yard area. Observe for 10 minutes and collect insects that rise to the surface. For identification and treatment options, bring insect samples to the County Extension Office. Three June Beetle grubs per square foot can do damage to turf grass. A well watered and fertilized lawn will resist insect damage. New preventative control products are available. Look for brands that contain Imidacloprid or holofenozide for preventative treatment that can be used from late May through July.

Lawn Seeding

For repairing damaged areas in the lawn or to establish a new lawn it is best to know that expensive seed will contain less weed seed and the better grass varieties. Best time to culture a new lawn is between August 15th and September 20th. Mid May is good also.

For sunny areas the grass seed blend should come close to the following ideal mix:

Kentucky Blue Grass	65%
Fine Fescue	20%
Perennial Rye Grass	15%

For Shady areas look for blends close to the following mixture:

Kentucky Blue Grass	40%
Fine Fescue	50%
Perennial Rye Grass	15%

For more detail you can go on the internet at uwex.edu/ces/wihort/. Open TURF. Look for and open Turf Publications

Growing Grass in Shade	Lawn Aeration and Top dressing
Lawn and Garden Fertilizer	Lawn Establishment and Renovation
Lawn Maintenance	Lawn Watering

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