

ACT NOW FOR A GREAT LAWN NEXT SUMMER

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Now is the time to prepare for a beautiful, lush lawn next summer. Late summer and early fall are prime time for weed control and planting grass seed.

If your lawn has weeds like dandelions, plantain and other perennial weeds, this is the best time to control them with a broadleaf weed killer such as 2, 4-D. This chemical works by translocating through the leaves into the roots of the plant, killing the entire root.

At this time of year, perennial plants are starting to get ready for winter. As part of that preparation, they move the sugars they have made through photosynthesis out of their leaves and into the roots, where they are stored over winter. This is partly why leaves on trees and shrubs turn colors in the fall. In spring, those stored sugars are sent back up to the top of the plant to grow leaves. That's when the maple syrup starts running!

When using a broadleaf weed killer such as 2, 4-D, it is sprayed on the leaves where it soaks in. The herbicide must translocate down to the roots of the weed in order to kill the entire root. At this time of year herbicides are most effective because they get sent down to the roots along with the sugars!

Annual weeds that may be in your lawn, such as crabgrass or ragweed, will die over winter. To control those weeds, use a pre-emergent herbicide in May, which keeps weed seeds from germinating. Try corn gluten meal for a non-chemical pre-emergent. During the year, mowing your grass higher, at 3 inches, prevents weed seeds from germinating and helps grass develop strong, deep roots and compete with weeds.

If you are rejuvenating your lawn, or establishing a new one, this is the best time to plant grass seed. Prepare the soil so that all existing weeds, including quackgrass, are removed. Smooth the soil surface, and broadcast the grass seed evenly. Rake the surface lightly or roll the surface to ensure the seeds are in good contact with the soil. Then keep the seeds moist until germinated. A layer of clean straw or other mulch helps retain moisture.

If you are planting mixture of different grasses, some may germinate in 3-4 days, while Kentucky Bluegrass takes 3-4 weeks to germinate. Be sure to keep the area moist until all species of grass have germinated.

Any annual weed seeds that germinate will die over winter, and we usually get some fall rains and less daytime heat, which helps keep seeds moist. Mow the new seeding after it reaches 4 inches, taking off about 1 inch.

This is also the time to give your lawn some food. The plants will use the nutrients to form healthy roots to get through winter, and get off to a good green-up next spring. An easy way to remember when to feed your lawn is to do it on the holidays—Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, and Halloween. The first three feedings are a typical lawn fertilizer, high in nitrogen. The Halloween feeding should be a “winterizer” type, with higher phosphorous and low nitrogen. Don't hurry out after the snow melts in spring and fertilize—wait until the end of May. Your grass will have plenty of food from the fall fertilization to get growing in spring. Too much fertilizer early in spring encourages top growth at the expense of roots.

In late fall, usually late October, it's a good idea to mow your grass shorter than the 2 ½ to 3 inches that you mow the rest of the year. Don't “scalp” the grass down to the crowns, but mow to about 1 ½ to 2 inches. This helps prevent fungal diseases, such as snow mold, that can form under snow during the winter. It also makes your lawn look greener earlier in spring, because the new growth gets up above the previous year's brown grass leaves sooner!

Taking care of your lawn now will pay off next summer. You can relax all winter, knowing your lawn will be ready to go when the snow melts!