

CARING FOR YOUR “GREEN CARPET”

by Melanie Wright

- 1) Apply fertilizer 3 – 4 times per year – early spring (as soon as the snow melts); late spring (late May/early June); mid-summer (July); early fall (September). Use the recommended application rates on the bag. Slow-release nitrogen (organic or synthetic sources) improves efficacy of the fertilizer.
- 2) Water – Use a rain gauge and empty after every rainfall. Count weekly accumulation – lawn requires 1” water per week. Infrequent, deep waterings are better than frequent, shallow waterings. Open, sunny areas require more water.
- 3) Mowing – Keep grass blades 5 – 6 cm. long. The leaves can hold more water and are better able to choke out weed seeds. Avoid cutting more than 1/3 of the blade per cutting – especially in the heat of summer. If you cut more, it exposes the tender crowns to sudden heat/sun and will sunburn.

Keep your mower blades sharp. A dull blade shreds the tops instead of a clean cut, making your lawn look brown at the tips. Mow when the grass is dry – to keep clippings from “clumping”. Clumps left on the lawn can prevent proper re-growth. Unless excessive, leave clippings on lawns to return nutrients and organic matter.

- 4) Weed Control -- A healthy, dense lawn will keep weed seeds from germinating. The key is to start with a weed-free lawn and keep it that way by feeding it well from then on. Spot spray or hand-pull if weed appears.
Crabgrass – If there was a crabgrass problem last summer, substitute the first fertilizer application in early spring with a fertilizer containing crabgrass control.
Broadleaf weeds – Hand-pulling/spot-weeding can control isolated growth. If large numbers of dandelions, plantain, etc. , substitute late spring feeding with fertilizer with weed control or spray weeds directly. If you maintain control of weeds over summer, you should be able to return to regular feeding program next year.
- 5) Insect Control -- Insects are often difficult to detect and hard to control once found. Repair insect-damaged lawns with clean, weed-free topsoil and insect-resistant grass seeds. Look for grass seed mixes with high percentage of perennial, turf-type ryegrass and fescues. These often carry a type of beneficial fungus, called endophyte, which insects find repulsive. The best time to repair seed a lawn is in early spring and/or early fall.