

HOW TO GET YOUR LAWN READY FOR SPRING



As the weather begins to warm up and winter fades into spring, it's time to take steps to create a yard that you will be proud to show off to family and friends. How is your lawn looking right now? Does it look weather-worn, tired or in need of some TLC to improve its appearance?

Even if your lawn looks less than stellar coming out of winter dormancy, you can take some proactive steps to revive your grass and restore it to its beautiful, green, lush state.

Several factors can cause lawn damage during the winter, including snow mold, rock salt damage, pet damage, winter desiccation (or winter drought damage), and bare spots due to a snow plow scraping the edges of your lawn along the driveway or sidewalks.



REMEMBER TO INCLUDE THESE CRITICAL STEPS IN YOUR LAWN CARE REGIMEN DURING THE SPRING AND SUMMER MONTHS:

INITIAL PREPARATION

Speed up the snow melting process and reduce damage to the lawn by breaking up piles of snow and ice, and moving them to a warmer surface. Removing the snow and melting it down will help warm the soil more quickly, which will in turn speed up the lawn's transition from winter dormancy to recovery mode.

If excessive debris or leaves were left on the lawn from the fall season, then right now is the best time to clean up the mess. Ideally, these things should be removed before it starts snowing in the fall, but if the lawn was neglected, then you need to do it first thing in the spring. Try to remove branches, debris, leaves or any other objects so they don't suffocate the grass and leave unsightly dead patches.

Have you noticed that rocks or sand were thrown into the grass from the snow blower? The easiest way to get rid of these stones is with a shop vacuum. It might look strange to use a shop vacuum on your lawn, but the vacuum provides a fast and effective way to get rid of those stones, quickly improve the appearance of your lawn, and prevent damage to your mower or your property from flying debris struck by your mower.

SEEDING

Not every lawn will need seeding, but you should look at the thickness of your lawn to determine if it would be beneficial to seed again. The first step is to gently rake the lawn to lift up the grass that was matted down through the winter. Lifting the grass allows the new seedlings to come through, and evens out the grass so that you can see the thin areas that can benefit from seeding. When the grass is raked, the ground will warm faster, promoting new shoot and root growth.

If you have had a history of snow mold or you are concerned about snow mold, raking the lawn will help reduce its effects. Snow mold is a fungal disease that attacks the grass given the correct conditions (cool and moist). If you have some snow mold, it will go away once the lawn dries up and gets some air movement from a little raking.



You do not need to wait until the lawn starts to green up before applying seed. Any thin or bare soil spots can be seeded any time as long as the ground is not frozen. Seeding during January through March is called dormant seeding. Dormant seeding can be successful if there is adequate moisture from snow and rainfall. During the late winter/early spring the seed will soak up moisture from snowmelt and rain, and will not germinate until the soils warm up in March or April. But if it is a very dry winter and dry spring, dormant seeding may not be successful, and these areas may need to be reseeded once it is warm enough to use a hose or sprinkler system.



If you have a dog, you may notice bare spots in your yard due to urination in the lawn. These bare spots are usually only recoverable by reseeding. Sometimes, a little gypsum and fresh water can help before reseeding these dog spots. Sprinkle gypsum on the dead spot and then soak the area in water before reseeding to neutralize the excess salts from the urine.



FERTILIZING

A good fertilizer can help improve the appearance of your lawn, but it is essential to make sure that you are using a high-quality fertilizer and applying it at the right time.

When it comes to fertilizer, it is absolutely essential that you follow the instructions on the package. It is possible to get too much of a good thing, and the nitrogen can actually damage your lawn if you apply it too frequently or if you apply too much at once.

Before applying fertilizer or any other type of lawn product, measure the “throw” of your spreader to make sure that you are following the right pattern as you move across the lawn. To make sure you are spacing your passes correctly, it is usually best to overlap the passes so that the flying fertilizer lands in the middle of the wheel tracks of the previous pass. The easiest method is to purchase the correct amount of fertilizer for the size of your yard, set the spreader to a very low setting, and treat the yard with many passes back-and-forth. Follow this by passing back and forth again perpendicular to the first paths, and repeat if necessary, until the fertilizer is all spread out evenly across the yard.

LABOR-SAVING PRODUCTS

Weeds and other unwanted plants might start growing in your lawn. If you see crabgrass or any other type of broadleaf weeds, it's best to take care of these problems before they worsen through the season.

Most crabgrass will start to grow when the soil temperatures reach 55-65 degrees Fahrenheit, which is typically in April. Timing of your pre-emergent is critical. The pre-emergent needs to be applied before the crabgrass germinates.

As the summer progresses, you might start noticing individual weeds popping up, and these can be sprayed with a spot-treatment product. Plant protection products in a hand-held, ready-to-use sprayer are the easiest way to treat these problems.

Follow the directions on the bottle very carefully to determine the right product to use and how to use it to prevent injury to your lawn or other plants.





MOWING

Most people assume that the lawn needs to be mowed only when it is getting too long, but it can actually be beneficial to mow the lawn before it grows very much. You can mow your yard once the threat of extremely cold nights has

passed. A good rule is to wait until the nights won't get below 20 degrees, which is usually in late March or early April.

Once the cold nights have passed, use a low enough height on the mower to trim off the brown blades from winter, which will allow the new blades of grass to be more visible and make the lawn look greener quicker.

The general rule for mowing frequency is to mow often enough that you do not remove more than 1/3 of the leaf tissue with your mower. So if you are trying to maintain your Kentucky bluegrass lawn at 2 inches, don't let the grass grow taller than 3 inches before you mow it, removing that top 1/3 of the plant. Following this 1/3 rule means you should probably mow your lawn every 5-6 days in the spring time when it is rapidly growing, and you might be able to reduce your mowing frequency to every 7-9 days in the summer when the growth slows from the high heat.

Mow Kentucky bluegrass around 2 inches in the spring and fall, and around 3 inches in the summer. Mow tall fescue around 2.75 inches in the spring and fall, and around 3.5 inches in the summer. If you mow the grass any shorter than these recommended heights, it will put stress on the grass and you might experience problems keeping it alive and lush.

AERATION

One common problem with lawn care is when the soil becomes compacted, either from regular wear and tear of people using the yard or from the weight of snow on the lawn's surface. You can aerate the lawn if you notice that the lawn dries out easily or it feels hard. Aeration will improve the ability of the soil to absorb air and water to the plant roots, and improve the appearance of your lawn.

Ideally, cool-season lawns should be aerated in the first part of spring or in the fall. Warm-season lawns should be aerated in the late spring or early summer. It is easier to aerate the lawn when it is slightly moist, so plan it for the day after watering the lawn or a day after it rains.

After the lawn is aerated, the excavated soil plugs can be broken up so they are dispersed evenly into the lawn. You can pound the plugs with the back of a rake, or simply mow the lawn and the mower will break them up.



WATERING

Proper watering is a key aspect of achieving a healthy lawn. Too much water can actually be detrimental, so you will need to consider the amount of water you are applying as well as the frequency and time of day.

The best time of day to water is early in the morning, right when the sun is beginning to rise. This will allow the water to soak into the lawn before the sun comes up and the temperature rises. Watering at night leaves moisture on the lawn for too long, which might lead to lawn disease problems.

Watering frequency will change with the weather. Typically, you should water the lawn about once a week in April to early May. As it warms up in May, you will probably need to water 1-2 times a week. During the hottest times of the year, you will likely need to water every 2-3 days. Try to use about $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 inch of water each time you water. In order to determine how long it takes to apply $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 inch of irrigation, you can use a rain gauge and time your sprinkler.

Make sure you set the timer of your irrigation system so that the watering schedule and amount is ideal for your system, lawn, and time of year. Even if you are using a hose, you can buy and attach a timer to the hose to ensure that you apply the correct amount of water and do not waste water with over-application.





To learn more about lawn care
or to request a free estimate,
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