

# ***The Sadler Lawn Club Handbook***

"A Beautiful Lawn Doesn't Happen by Itself"

**From the Sadler Green HOA**

# MARCH

## A New Lawn Season Approaches

Warmer temps, sunny / rainy / windy weather, daylight savings time almost here. It must be March and 'yes' ... a new season of lawn (and garden) maintenance.

Nature is getting ready to throw all kinds of problems at us this year from weeds to hot weather. But, we look forward to helping you get through it all and produce the best, greenest, lawn possible. We will also pass along a few tips for your trees and bushes. Remember, our goal is to create the best 'curb appeal' for our neighborhood to keep up our property values.

Your grass won't 'wake up' from it's long winter nap until the weather stays above 50 degrees. Around here, that means March. So, it's time to get a jump on all of the pre-season lawn to-do list now while you don't have to mow, yet. Here's what we recommend over the next several weekends...

### *Pre-Season To Dos:*

- Address growing weeds left from the winter
- Apply pre-emergent crabgrass control
- Mower and equipment tune-up
- Clean up the lawn to get it ready to mow

### **1) Kill Those Winter Weeds!**

Lawn weeds like Poa Annua (Annual Bluegrass), Common Chickweed, and Henbit are "winter annuals". This means they germinate in fall, thrive in spring and then die during summer, but not before scattering seed so the cycle can start all over again in fall. ("Summer annuals", like Crabgrass, Foxtail and Barnyardgrass, have a different cycle of germinating in spring, thriving in summer and dying just prior to winter, but not before scattering their seeds to continue that cycle again in springtime.



Winter Weeds



Poa Annua Weed

Weeds like the ones shown here are easy to kill anytime. Just hit them with either Weed-B-Gone (if they are in the grass) or RoundUp (if they are in the mulch). That should take care of them for the season. But, they will still return next fall. Fortunately, you can hit them again before the cold weather sets in.

## 2) Get Rid of Crabgrass



Scotts TurfBuilder Plus Halts

Take a good look at your lawn. Do you see brown spots mixed in with the grass? That's dead crabgrass. It will be back, unless...

Grab your wallet and car keys and head down to Lowe's or Home Depot. Pick up about five bags of pelleted lime (always good for your lawn), AND a bag of Scott's Turf Builder with HALTS Crabgrass Control. Apply both products by mid-March. They can be applied at the same time. (Make sure your spreader is washed out before you use it!) You can always pull crabgrass up by hand after it has appeared, but that isn't the best, easiest, or most long-term solution. Believe me- one ounce of prevention in the early Spring is worth a pound of cure later.

### 3) Get Your Mower and Other Tools in Shape

Depending on what you did / didn't do last fall to winterize your mower, you will need to do now.

Here's the list to get your mower ready:

- spark plug*: replace
- oil*: drain and refill with fresh
- air filter*: remove, clean, and reinstall
- gas*: make sure you have fresh gas ready;  
*don't use the gas that you have left over from last year!*
- mower blade*: replace (or sharpen depending on age; replace every 2 years)

Here are a couple of tips to make your job a bit easier...

**TIP: Blade Sharpener-** I found this handy little blade sharpener available at the Home Depot. Hopefully they restocked it this year.

It will let you just tip over your mower and sharpen the blades without taking them off. What a time saver! Check the Home Depot-around \$5. (unplug your spark plug—no missing fingers, please!)



Blade Sharpener



**TIP: "LiquiVac Oil Extractor"** (2 Gallon)

Don't you hate to drain your mower oil? Here is my recommendation from last season. I found this handy little device at the Home Depot last year and it has proven to be well worth the money (about \$50). It is great for removing used oil from hard-to-reach drains on large or small engines. The easy-to-use pump tank comes with a suction hose and storage cap to save the oil you remove so you can transport it for recycling. The key advantage here is that you don't have to remove any drain plug or save used oil in a pan. Just stick the hose into the oil from the top and suction it out. It's very clean and neat! While you are at the Home Depot, grab one while they are still in stock. You won't be sorry. (if they are out-of-stock, you can still order one online)

#### 4. Start Cleaning Up

*Lawn Debris:* Get debris out of the way by picking up dead leaves, sticks, and branches that have fallen, and rocks that have been heaved to the surface by frost.

*Soil Test:* This might be a good time to have your soil tested if fertilizers and other lawn products didn't seem to be working last year. To see if your soil needs additional nutrients or minerals, or an adjustment in acidity or alkalinity, send a sample to your local county extension service.

*Edge Your Beds:* This job is MUCH easier while the soil is soft. So wait until after it rains (Sunday?). Then, use a flat-bladed spade or a lawn edger to cut a clean edge where planting beds meet the lawn. Cut deep enough to sever the grass roots trying to grow into the bed.

*If you take the time NOW to check off these to dos when you don't have grass to cut, you'll be well on your way to enjoying spring when it gets into full swing.*

## A Word About the Crape Myrtles...

As an extra, let's talk about those bushes that we all acquired from our builder, Crape Myrtles. Unfortunately for many, these were planted too close to the house and are now blocking windows. Normally these grow to a height of 25-30 feet. So unless you want to replant them in your yard where they belong, you need to at least keep them trimmed up. An added benefit of trimming front landscaping is more security. You see, burglars love to hide behind bushes so they are not seen. With trim/neat landscaping, they might not have anywhere to hide.

### Trimming Your Crape Myrtle

**Objective-** To maintain well-spaced, main trunks with beautiful bark and space to allow sunlight.

**Tools Needed-** hand pruners, loppers, pole pruner, pruning saw (depending on the thickness of the branches)

#### When to Cut

Now is the best time, although you may do it in late fall. The key is to be able to see the branches and where to cut. As long as you get it before it starts to bloom in the spring, it's okay.



### What to Cut



<-----These are cut too short!

Many people end up cutting too much off when trimming. Crape Myrtles like to be trimmed and will usually grow back no matter what. But to maintain a good shape, cut in this sequence:

1. Suckers growing out of the base at the ground
2. All side branches growing from the main trunks up to a height of at least 4 feet
3. Any branches higher than 4 feet that grow toward the center
4. All branches that rub together, cross, or are dead
5. Any branch that takes away from the overall look.

**Important! Always cut back to a larger branch of the trunk. Don't leave stubs as shown.**

## Weeds!

If you have strolled around your yard lately, you may have noticed the 'explosion' of weeds in the past few weeks. Those leftover winter weeds are popping up everywhere! So today we are going to cover 2 lawn jobs that should be on top of your list right now- Weed Control and Bare Spots

### WEEDS/WEED CONTROL

And you thought we were done with the weeds after we sprayed them last fall?



carolina-geranium

Not so fast! We may have killed them last summer/fall, but they made sure they left some seeds for recovery this year. Weed seeds can also arrive on lawns via birds or even the wind. A lawn full of weeds signals more problems than just the weeds. Most weed problems are related to the topsoil's health and condition, and the vitality of the turf grass. If you had a thick, lush lawn last year, you shouldn't have a big problem this year. The best barrier against weeds is thick grass. That's our goal this year! Occasional weeds in a healthy looking lawn are to be expected (and much easier to get rid of). Hopefully, you have already sprayed the annual winter weeds that grew in the cold weather.

So it's time to focus our attention on the weeds that have all-of-a-sudden sprouted up. With all of the wet weather this year, it's been a great time for weed growing, and it appears that there are a number of residents that have the problem. Pictured here are just some of the wonderful specimens that inhabit our neighborhood...





henbit



carpet-weed



young dandelion

It's time to get rid of these weeds before they start to spread, particularly the dandelions that are just beginning to sprout. Give them a little time, and they will be all over your lawn (and your neighbors).

So head on over to Home Depot or Lowe's and pick up a large container of Ortho Weed-B-Gone (or similar). It's best to get the large container since you will probably need it throughout the season (saves you a trip!).





Weed-B-Gone

Weed-B-Gone is probably the best at killing most of the weeds that we have growing. The only precaution for applying Weed-B-Gone is to make sure you allow it to dry. Most of the weed killers require at least 4 hours of drying time (some more than that). So check the weather, read the label, and plan accordingly.



RoundUp...Use only for mulched areas

You might also pick up Round-Up for weeds. But, just make sure you don't apply it on your lawn. This will kill ALL of your weeds AND your lawn at the same time! Only use it on the mulch or pavement cracks.

You may have to go back a second time, but make sure you get at least one application down this weekend.

## BARE SPOTS!

If you still have a few bare spots left over from last fall, now is a great time to reseed. That will give them enough time to get established before the hot weather comes. Here's what you need to know to get the job done...



Scotts Starter Fertilizer

1) Head on over to Lowe's, Home Depot, or Southern States to get the 3 ingredients:[7]

- topsoil
- 'starter fertilizer'
- grass seed (our original sod was mostly have what is called "Fescue 31" or "Tall Fescue"),

OR...

- Pick up a bottle of Scotts EZ Seed that has the 3 ingredients included.



Scotts EZ Seed

- 2) Scratch up the soil where the bare spots are and apply the 3 ingredients (or EZ Seed) as instructed on the label.
- 3) Important! Keep it wet for 7 days until germination. Once the seed dries out, there is no bringing it back!
- 4) Don't cut it until it is at least 4-5 inches high.



Tall Fescue Grass Seed

Of course, you can always go the quick route and lay down sod patches (currently in stock at Home Depot and Lowe's). Just make sure you water it thoroughly before and after applying. And keep it wet for the next 7 days.

## Complete the Job



Don't Forget the Curb!

If you are one of the lucky ones to have a sidewalk out front, please make sure you take care of it properly. Your grass between the sidewalk and curb is just as important as the grass on the other side. It's one of the most important things that contributes to great 'curb appeal'. So, please don't ignore it. Kill the weeds and plant good grass seed to complete your great looking lawn!

That's it for this now. Next time we will tackle the job of turning on your irrigation system. Yes, you can do it yourself!

# APRIL

## Irrigation System Wake-Up

As irrigation goes, it's much simpler to 'activate' your system in the spring vs. 'winterizing' it in the fall. It should be something that you can do yourself instead of paying a company to do it. This is assuming that you properly winterized last fall before the beginning of the cold weather. If not, then you are in for a challenging system activation this year. That could mean anything from broken pipes and sprinkler heads to valve replacement. If this is your situation, then call in an expert...now (they will be getting very busy soon).

Hopefully, you did put your irrigation system to bed properly last fall. So let's go over what it takes to 'wake it up' over the next few weeks...

Here are the 4 general steps for activation:

1. Turn on the water
2. Test the zones
3. Program the controller
4. Make sprinkler adjustments (as needed)

Sounds simple, right? Well, it can be depending on any problems you encounter. Let's get started...

### 1. Turn on the Water



Fig. 1 PVC Valve and Cap



**Fig. 2 Wrap Teflon Tape before replacing cap**

- Replace the PVC end cap that was removed to flush out your system in the fall. We recommend buying a new piece each year just in case it was 'wrench-tightened' last fall. A wrench-tightened cap is a no-no! If the cap was tightened with a wrench, there is a good chance that it may have sustained a small crack that will cause a major leak later on. (Believe me, it happened to my system 4 years ago). So buy a new cap, wrap Teflon tape around the threads, and hand-tighten it back on. (Fig. 1 & 2)
- Turn the main back-flow valves to the OPEN position (parallel to pipes). (Fig. 3)



- Check that the "petcock valves"(small brass extensions) are [4] Fig. 3 Turn back- flow valves to OPEN position (parallel to pipe) CLOSED (perpendicular to the pipe). Use a screwdriver to make the adjustment. (Fig. 4)



**Fig. 4 Petcock Valves should be in CLOSED position (perpendicular to pipe)**

- SLOWLY turn the main red-handled PVC value until you can hear water begin to flow. Continue to SLOWLY open the valve to the parallel position (OPEN) until water fills the pipe and you can't hear any more water flowing. Doing this SLOWLY will prevent full pressure being forced through the system and causing possible damage. (Fig. 5)]
- 5 Turn main PVC value to OPEN position (parallel to pipe)



Fig. 5

## 2. Test the Zones

Once you have the water turned on, it's time to head to the controller unit, probably located on your garage wall.

- Plug in the cord; make sure the display lights up. Note: because there is a battery backup, all of your previous settings should be intact (if not, change your battery!)
- Turn the dial to "Set Current Date & Time" and use the "+", "-", and "Next" buttons to change the display to the current day, and time. See your owner's manual for more details. (available online at: [7]<http://www.hunterindustries.com/Support/>)
- Set program 3 to cycle through all of your sprinklers and zones 2 minutes at a time.
- Turn the dial to "RUN" and go observe how the sprinklers come on and the coverage areas of each. Make note of which ones need to be adjusted or replaced.





Fig. 6 Controller Unit in Garage

- Make your sprinkler adjustments. Need help? Click on "Hunter Sprinklers" under the "Lawn Watering" tab on the home page for more information.



Hunter Remote Controller

TIP! If you want to save time checking out your sprinklers, Hunter sells a handy remote control similar to the ones the pros use. These are relatively inexpensive. I found one for about \$130 online at [10]Sprinkler Warehouse. This will let you walk around your yard and turn your sprinklers on/off individually without going back to the base unit. A big time-saver!

### 3. Program the controller (Fig. 6)

This may be the simplest step, since all of your previous settings from last fall should still be there. BUT, are they the correct ones for the spring? You may need to make some adjustments. Just set all sprinklers for 20 minutes each, for now. Then see how much rainfall we get over the next month. You may not even have to use the system for a few weeks!

#### 4. Make Sprinkler Adjustments (as needed)



**Clamp used to hold sprinkler in UP position for adjustment.**

We have basically 2 types of sprinkler heads, Rotary and Spray (or "misting"). The rotary heads are the larger ones that cover the bigger areas; the spray heads usually cover the narrow strips by the driveway. I'm not going to go into the fine details since Hunter does that very well and I will give you the link to the exact page on the Hunter website.



Top of Sprinkler

**Rotary Heads:** These heads all rotate from a fixed right side point, arcing to the left. You can make several adjustments. But one tip I want to pass along is how to get the sprinkler to stay in the up position for adjustment. Hunter recommends using the little white adjustment tool to pull up the head using the 'lifting socket'. But I will add that you can keep it up by clamping the base in the up position with a metal clamp (shown). For adjustments, here's the sequence:

- Set the beginning point of the arc (fixed right, rotating left). Grip the base and turn.
- Set the distance it rotates to the left- 'Adjustment Socket'
- Set the width of the spray- 'Nozzle Range Adjustment Screw'
- Change the red nozzle to put out more or less water

**Spray/Misting Heads:** These heads are a bit easier to adjust, but the 3 ways to adjust them are the same:

- Set the beginning of the arc by grabbing the base and turning with your hand.
- Set the distance of the arc by using the white tool and the 2-prong end. Rotate it to the left.
- Set the distance of the spray by turning the center screw.

Some other things to know:

- Where to find replacement parts (nozzles, heads, white adjustment tool, etc.) One place I know of is in Ashland at John Deere Landscapes. The other is on Midlothian Turnpike, just east of Rt. 288. Here are the directions to the Ashland store-



11102 Air Park Rd., Ashland

Directions:

- Rt. 95 N
- Exit 86A Atlee/Elmont Right on Sliding Hill Rd
- Go 1 mile
- Left onto Air Park Road
- Down about 1/4 mile on right

Directions to the Midlothian store:

- Take Rt. 288 South
- Exit onto Midlothian Turnpike EAST
- Get into the left lane and turn LEFT at the first light
- Take first right; John Deere is on the left

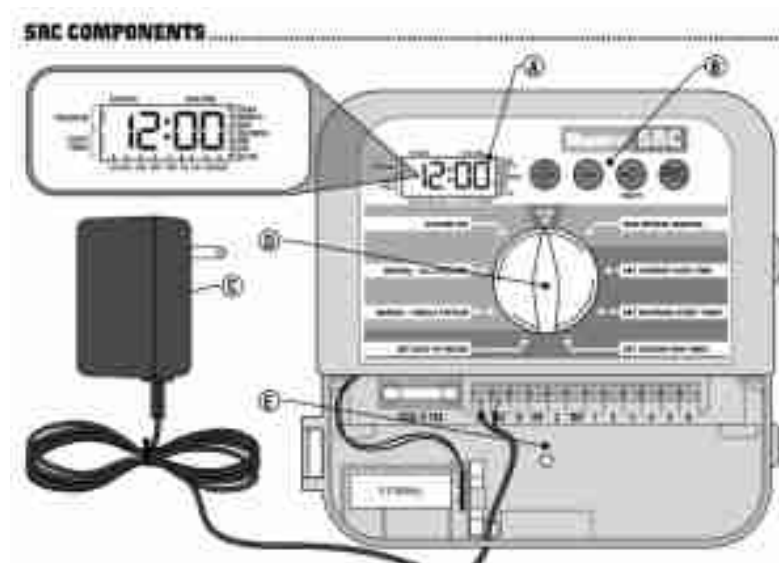
Spade Shovel

- How to replace a sprinkler This is fairly easy IF you have the right tool. Take a drive to Home Depot and pick up a "spade-shovel" (pictured). This will allow you to dig carefully around the sprinkler without having to pull up much soil. Cut a circle around the head, being careful not to dig too deeply at a time so you don't cut the water line. Take a little soil at a time, removing the loose dirt. When you are near the base, remove the dirt by hand and clear around the sprinkler base. Then, twist off the old sprinkler head and twist on the new one. Back-fill the dirt and replace the circle of grass. That's it. (You may want to make your new sprinkler adjustments before you turn on the water.)

Be ready for the watering season. Make your sprinkler adjustments (and replacements) now! And don't pay those costly landscaper fees. You CAN do it yourself!

## Irrigation Set-Up Part 2

Even though we have had some rain over the last month, we need to have our irrigation systems ready to roll in case this recent rain is not sufficient. Remember, your lawn needs at least an inch of water per week (more with trees planted). So I thought it may be helpful to finish the Hunter irrigation system start-up and particularly how to properly adjust the controller. I have also included some tips on how often you need to water your lawn.



**Hunter Controller**

### Adjusting Your Hunter Controller

1. Replace the backup battery (bottom of unit). I'll bet you have the original battery in your unit. Time to replace it with a fresh one! You'll be happy you did when you don't have to reprogram everything next spring.

2. Correct the date/time. Turn the knob to "Set Current Date/Time" and adjust using the + and - buttons.
3. Set the start time. Turn the knob to "Set Watering Start Times" and adjust using the + and - buttons. The best time to water is early in the morning, when evaporation rates are lowest, water pressure is at its peak, and there is usually no wind. Irrigating in the afternoon is wasteful because of higher evaporation rates, and prolonged damp conditions in the evening may encourage disease development. Even 4 AM is not too early! Make sure you are on Program A (press the PRG button until "A" displays). Also use Start Time #1 (press Next until you get to 1).
4. Set the days to water. Turn the knob to "Set Days to Water" and adjust using the + and - buttons. For now, just set it to water once a week. A healthy lawn requires just about 1" of water each week during the growing season. It won't harm your lawn if it doesn't get exactly 1" every week, but extended shortages will cause your lawn to go dormant. More about this later.
5. Set the watering time for each zone (usually 4-8 zones). Turn the knob to "Set Station Run Times" and adjust using the + and - buttons. You will need to press NEXT to cycle through the zones. For now, I would set each for 30 minutes. You can adjust each zone later.

That's it! 4-8 zones, set to water for 30 minutes each, once a week (one program) As the season progresses, you can customize the time/days/zones/programs to meet your watering needs.

Don't let it happen! If your lawn goes into drought stress and summer dormancy, it is much more susceptible to unfavorable pest activity, diseases, and weed infestation. This can lead to areas of the lawn that may be hard to differentiate (to the untrained eye) between a dormant lawn, or damage occurring from insects and disease. Watering too little can be harmful to your lawn also.

Do you know how much water your system is putting down? In each zone? You might want to pick up a rain gauge such as the one pictured here. They are available at Lowe's and the Home Depot (inexpensive).



Rain Gauge

Find one that can be stuck into the ground. Place it in the middle of a zone while you are watering to check how much water gets to the soil in the watering time you have allocated. Keep accurate records of how long you need to run your sprinkler or sprinkler system to deliver the required amounts of water for your lawn, and then base future waterings on what you have learned from your observations.

## **When to Water: Frequency and Amount**

Try to give your lawn the water it needs—and no more. This moderate approach conserves an important resource, saves money, and helps prevent grass diseases caused by too much water. How much water your lawn needs depends on the health of your lawn and soil, the amount of rainfall your lawn gets, and the climate.

How is your grass root structure? When trying to determine the depth of your grass roots, consider how much time you have taken to improve your soil and the type of grass you are growing. Some grasses, such as tall fescue like we have, have roots that reach one foot deep. Others grow to only half that, in even the best conditions. As your grass develops deeper roots, adjust your watering-depth target so that you continue to encourage roots to go deeper.

You should determine how much water is needed to moisten soil to the root zone. A good rule of thumb for most grasses is one to two inches per week. If you have porous soil that drains quickly (this is what most of us have), you would apply one inch of water twice a week. Conversely, if your soil holds water well, a good guess would be 1 inch once a week. If it rains during the week, decrease your watering by the amount of rain that fell. If it's hot and sunny or windy, you may need to increase the watering amount and frequency.

Do NOT follow the common practice of light, frequent waterings. This only encourages a shallow root system, and increases the chances that your lawn will go into summer drought stress. Grass signals that it needs water by losing its spring. When you walk across the lawn and see your footprints, your lawn probably needs to be watered!

Proper watering practices prevent unnecessary harm to your lawn and will save re-seeding work in the fall!

Hopefully you are following our spring schedule and have completed the following lawn to-dos:

1. Fertilized with a crabgrass pre-emergent, such as Scotts Turf Builder Plus Halts (important!)
2. Sprayed any weeds with a weed killer such as Ortho Weed-B-Gone (Round-Up for non-grassy areas)
3. Spot-seeded any bare spots in the lawn
4. Performed spring maintenance to have your mower, trimmer, and blower ready to go (spark plug, gas, oil, blade sharpening)
5. Made at least several cuts, trimming to about 2 1/2 inches.
6. Turned on your irrigation system and tested the sprinkler heads in each zone



# MAY

## "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly"

We have certainly had great weather for growing grass! But along with the grass come the weeds. You need to pay attention to this problem to keep your lawn looking great. You will notice that the thicker your lawn, the less weeds will be able to come through and grow.

We have noticed a BIG improvement in the appearance and condition of neighborhood lawns this spring over last year. Hats off to those who have put in the efforts over the last 12 months to help maintain the curb appeal (and value) of your lawn and the neighborhood, in general. But, there are still a few who are struggling. Here's a look at some of the "good, bad, and ugly".

**The GOOD...** You can really tell that a lot of work has gone into making these lawns look great!





**The BAD...** These aren't really "bad" lawns. Just lawns in need of a little work (and soon).



**The UGLY...**

These lawns are in major need of repair. They probably didn't have any irrigation or fertilizer last year and need immediate attention. If this is your neighbor, please give them some help and support. If not, their weeds will become your weeds soon.





### Time for Lawn "TLC"

Hopefully, your lawn is the one that's green, lush and looking great! Now your challenge is to keep it that way... 'keep it goin'. We are in the maintenance part of the season where lawns are actively growing and require a lot of the basics to stay in great shape:

- **WATER** We got over an inch of rain this week. But how long can that last? You need to monitor weekly rainfall and supplement it with your irrigation system. We recommend that you water longer and less frequently. Also water early in the morning, like 5-6 AM. That way the water will not evaporate as quickly and, it is usually not windy. So the water goes where you want it to.
- **SUN** We have had some sunny days that are great for growing grass. The problem is the heat on some days. Again, cool off your lawn with a drink from your irrigation system.
- **NUTRIENTS** As long as you put down fertilizer within the last 6 weeks, your lawn should be growing well and looking healthy. We will be spreading the next application soon.

### Keep your Lawn Trim

The only step left in our TLC program is regular mowing. Here are some basic tips to make sure you aren't damaging your lawn with improper mowing:

1. Keep your blades sharp. Never mow with a dull blade since it will 'pull' your grass out instead of cutting it. You can easily remove and sharpen the blade, or you can replace it fairly inexpensively. You can also use a blade sharpening tool that let's you sharpen without removing the blade. Sharpen your blades every 6-8 weeks. Mow only 1/3 of the grass blade each cut.



2.

Mow your lawn when it is about a third higher than the recommended mowing height. For our lawns (tall fescue), ideal mowing height is 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches. Grass does better if it's cut at a higher mower setting. Higher mowing heights provide for a deeper root system, a better looking lawn, and less invasion by weeds.



3. To bag or let it fly? Bagging is okay when you want to pick up leaves and other debris, but you should use a mulching blade and blow out the clippings so they can decompose and return nutrients back into the soil.
4. When to mow? Avoid mowing in the heat of the day, which can damage the grass. And don't mow your grass when it's wet. This can damage your mower and leave unsightly clumps in the grass.



5.

Mow in a different pattern each time. This is my favorite one! Have a little fun mowing! Mowing in varying patterns helps prevent soil compaction, keeps grass healthier, and avoids putting ruts in the lawn. Plus it's more fun! If you want the striped look of a golf course, just put a roller on the mower (available at many hardware or supply stores – usually as a riding mower attachment).

Remember- a green lawn is a happy lawn!

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## Fertilizer Time #2



"Seed Heads"

Many lawns are developing "seed heads"- grass reseeding itself. All fescue and bluegrass blends produce "seed heads" this time of the year. They are immature seeds and will not grow unless you let them mature (about a foot tall) and dry. Even then they need to make it into the soil. While it's been difficult to mow with all of the rain, and your lawn is probably higher than you like, seed heads make your lawn look unsightly. Please mow as soon as possible. Don't count on the seed heads to really have an effect on your lawn's thickness.

Time to fertilize again.



The weeds are also trying to grow. But we can take care of them and the fertilizing at the same time. Depending on how your lawn looks right now, will determine which type of fertilizer you need to put down. If you don't have any (or minimal) weeds, then regular Scotts Turf Builder is fine. You may also find Super Turf Builder (best quality) or Turf Builder with Summerguard (kills insects). Any of these variations will do the trick. Mow your lawn, place your spreader on the correct setting (check the bag), and fertilize. Then, if rain isn't expected in the next day or so, water in the fertilizer with your sprinklers.

Take care of the weeds at the same time.



]If you still have fair amount of weeds in your lawn and want to take care of them AND fertilize it

If you still have a fair amount of weeds in your lawn and want to take care of them AND fertilize at the same time, then Scotts Turf Builder Plus 2 Weed Control is what you want. This is a trickier procedure to get this done correctly. Wait for your lawn to be a third higher than normal and with weeds actively growing (not cut down). Get out early in the morning when the grass is still wet from the morning dew (or lightly water with your sprinklers). Then, set your spreader according to the setting on the bag and spread the fertilizer. It's important that your lawn is wet so that the weed control can stick and dry on the leaves of the weeds. Make sure it isn't supposed to rain for several days (turn off your sprinklers) so that it gets a chance to work on the weeds. And don't mow for several days either.

What do the (N-P-K) numbers mean on the bag?

The label on all fertilizer bags is required to show the percentage by weight of nitrogen, available phosphate and soluble potash. This is called the guaranteed analysis of the fertilizer. For instance, a bag of Turf Builder with the numbers "30-3-3" is translated as:

- 30 % Nitrogen (N) (promotes overall grass shoot growth and gives it the green color)
- 3 % Phosphate ( $P_2O_5$ ) (promotes strong root growth)
- 3 % soluble Potash ( $K_2O$ ) (helps grass withstand stress, drought or disease)

This time of year you want your lawn to thicken up as much as possible (even though you may have to mow more often), to get it ready for the long, hot summer ahead. That's why it's important to fertilize NOW before those 90 degree days are here. So get out this weekend and fertilize your lawn.



## More About Weeds



As we mentioned, this is prime weather for weeds, as well as lawns. Most local neighborhood lawns are in pretty good shape. But we are beginning to see public lawn enemy #1-Chickweed, #2-Dandelion, and #3-Clover. So it's time to take care of them NOW and not wait until later. Remember- a healthy lawn will squeeze out the bad weed guys.

These pics are all from our neighborhood. The bad thing is that if these are in your neighbor's yard and they are not eliminated, they will be in your lawn sometime soon!

The good thing is that these weeds can be eliminated fairly easily with Weed-B-Gone or a similar product.



Weed-B-Gone for use on lawns



Don't use RoundUp on lawns!

Just make sure that you follow directions on the label and that it remains 'rain-free' for at least several hours. And don't let your pets or kids on it for a day (or until it rains).

That makes this Saturday a perfect day to hit those weeds, with rain coming in on Sunday (unless you are planning on applying the Turf Builder Plus 2).

One important note too. **DO NOT USE Round-Up on your lawn.** It's only for non-lawn areas. I've seen homeowners that are now sorry they used the wrong weed killer. They now have brown spots in their lawn and will be back to spot seed in the fall!

## Mowing Tip of the Month

Don't you just hate to have to trim around these pipes in the middle of your lawn? What a pain! Well, you don't have to IF you lower them below the cutting height of your mower. How ? Most residents don't realize it, but the pipes are actually not iron or metal, but rather PVC. Only the caps are metal. So, pull off the cap, pull out a small hand saw and cut the PVC pipe down to ground level. (don't be afraid that it isn't perfectly level- it won't matter) Then, just replace the cap and you can mow over it next time instead of trimming around it. Big time saver!



A Nuisance Pipe in the Lawn



Drainage Pipes May Be Lowered!

# JUNE

## Summer's Here ... Along with New Lawn Problems!

Summer is almost here! That means that we are entering into the summer maintenance schedule for your lawn. The recent hot weather means that we need to be proactive so that we can stay ahead of any and all of the problems that summer heat can bring.

**Watering-** Make sure that you are watering your lawn on a regular basis so that it gets at least an inch of water every 4 days. Don't think that if you let it go 'dormant' (brown) by not watering, it will come back in the fall. It may work, but you will be planting grass seed next spring to fill in all of those dead spots! It's easier to just keep it growing during the summer. (Also, our covenants require you to water your lawn to keep it healthy.) Make sure you water in the early morning when less will evaporate. Do not water in the heat of the day!

**Irrigation Gaps-** Every summer we see lawns that have browned out areas (not insect damage). These are easy to spot and easier to fix. Just turn on your sprinkler head and notice what parts of the lawn the water is hitting. Most of the time the brown area appears because the sprinkler is not getting to that section. So test your sprinkler coverage and make the necessary adjustments! For help, see our blog on the irrigation system and how to adjust the sprinkler nozzles.

**Mowing-** You should be mowing your lawn at the highest setting on your mower. This will encourage deeper root growth, better water retention, and fewer insects.



**Insect Damage-** Those brown patches that may appear in your lawn in May or June may not be the result of your neighbor's dog. They could be something much worse...GRUBS! A grub is simply the larva stage of over 150 species of beetles. They damage lawns by feeding on the grass roots. White grubs rest in

your lawn all winter (they were laid there by the adult beetle last summer) and begin to 'come alive' in the spring and summer. Then they grow into adult beetles (e.g., Japanese beetles), leave the grass and begin feeding on your trees and bushes (like many of the Crape Myrtle trees growing locally). A real pest indeed.



You can spot active grubs in your lawn by the presence of brown or dead grass leaves in small little patches in your lawn. Left untreated, these spots grow into larger areas that you can pull back with your hand to expose the little white suckers.

How do you get rid of grubs? The most effective way is to prevent them in the first place.



Milky Spore is a natural product that must be applied 6 times over the course of 2 seasons. Actively feeding grubs ingest the 'disease' and die. The best part- once you introduce this 'disease' into your lawn, it will last for 10-20 years.



If you have active grub damage NOW, pick up a bag of either Scotts GrubEx or Bayer Grub Killer and follow the directions to apply it to your lawn. Just make sure it has "Merrit" (Dylox is the chemical name) as the active ingredient. You may then follow up with the Milky Spore treatments next month.

Once the white grub turns into a beetle they will not harm the turf. However, they will begin to feed on plants in the surrounding areas. Do not use those yellow beetle traps that are very common this time of year since they only bring more beetles to the yard, increasing the chance of more grubs!

## Bermudagrass

We can't let a discussion on summer pests go by without at least one mention of one of the most difficult weeds to eradicate...Bermudagrass.



It is a highly invasive perennial grassy weed that is found in the south where the ground does not freeze. Bermudagrass invades lawns and landscape beds, crowding out desirable plants. It reproduces by seed, and stems, both above ground and underground.

A general description: Slender leaf blades; Stems are slightly hairy; Turns brown in cold weather; Dense,



deep growing root system; Will not grow in dense shade. Bermudagrass is hard to eliminate because it will reproduce by any piece of stem or root left behind. The deep roots make them hard to pull up completely. You will need to use a recommended herbicide containing glyphosate and apply it when plants are actively growing. We seem to have a lot of this grass trying to grow in many yards in the neighborhood. It is very hard to pull out and usually needs to be sprayed to eliminate it from your yard. Take a look around when you are out walking. It is usually beside the curb and will grow over the curb, into the street. Bermudagrass can even grow under driveways to reach the other side!

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## **What is your lawn saying to you?**

Conditions are great for outdoor work this weekend, particularly in the mornings. So it's time to do that lawn work that you have been putting off!

This week, and for the rest of the hot summer season, your lawn is beginning the test of survival against the sun's damaging heat. By all means, water your lawn early in the morning (before the heat of the day) and make sure it gets at least an inch of water every 4 days. Use a rain gauge to be certain.

You may even want to 'cool it down' after dinner on the extremely hot days with an additional quick 10 minute soaking.



Check your lawn regularly for heat stress. Yes, your lawn will 'tell you' when it needs some extra watering. It will turn a dark green or brownish green in areas where you should give it an extra drink. Sometimes this is a result of not enough water... increase the irrigation timing. Or, it could be incorrect sprinkler coverage... test your sprinkler to make sure it is watering everywhere it should and adjust as necessary.

Take a ride around our neighborhood and you can tell who is properly watering their lawn and who is not (and who isn't watering at all!). We encourage you to keep up with your lawn irrigation during the summer months to help maintain our property values plus, it is required by our By-Laws!

Sure it's good to conserve water by not irrigating so much as to cause run-off. But, you should be watering at least the minimum amount for your lawn to stay green and continue to grow in the hot months (a minimum of 1 inch of water every 4 days from either rain or sprinklers).

Summer Weeds! Disposing of unwanted weeds is time-consuming, exhausting, and may be costly if you are using weed killers. You can stop weeds in their tracks before they start growing. This is easier and cheaper than trying to spray them when you see them. There are a number of preventive weed control methods that are environmentally safer and longer lasting. Here are some that you may want to consider before you break out that bottle of Weed-B-Gone...

1. Fix any vacant or damaged spots. Unwanted weeds take hold in vacant areas within your lawn and areas where the grass is thin. You should try to fill those bald areas in your lawn during the early spring by scattering grass seed and carefully raking (be sure to water). You can even get grass seed to grow in the warmer weather, as long as it's not too hot and you water more than normal. In the event the grass is lean in places, put fertilizer to boost the grass.
2. Reduce compacted soil. Major foot traffic areas are susceptible to unwanted weeds because the ground will get packed down and your lawn will have difficulty developing. In this situation you should put in a walkway (with thick mulch or tiny rocks) in order to avoid undesirable weeds from developing instead of grass.
3. Mow higher. Mow your lawn at least 3 inches tall or more so that it can get cover from the sun and the unwanted weeds, and help prevent their growth.
4. Eliminate unwanted weeds close to drive-ways and walkways. Unwanted weeds achieve a grip in places where excessive temperature may damage your lawn, such as the edges of driveways and sidewalks (the pavement raises the temps in the surrounding grass). Make sure your sprinklers overlap a bit onto the driveway to keep the edges watered and cool off the pavement.

Preventative yard weed management can be less hazardous to your natural environment and much more long-lasting than spraying.

### **"I water properly but my lawn still turns brown!"**

Lawns can turn brownish in spots even if you do water correctly. This could be the result of "iron deficiency" or "iron chlorosis". The grass leaves will start to yellow at the very tip of the leaf. The lower leaves (closest to the ground) still remain green. It occurs most on heavy textured soils, such as the clay soil that we have around here. Scalping your lawn by cutting it too short can produce this condition because the grass is struggling to grow back from being cut so short. The roots cannot take up enough iron to keep pace with the new foliage that is growing back so quickly. This is why we recommend mowing at the highest level this time of year.

"Iron deficiency" and "nitrogen deficiency" in a lawn are not the same and can't be treated the same way. Both deficiencies can make the lawn look yellow, but the actual leaf location where the yellowing occurs tells the story. Nitrogen deficiency causes the lower leaves to turn yellow. This is the exact opposite of what happens with iron deficiency.

### **Can I fertilize my lawn in the summer to keep it green?**

Dr. Iron, the secret summer solution to a yellowing lawn

Fertilizing in the hot summer months is a no-no. It can cause fungus to appear in your lawn in the form of brown patches. And, as we just mentioned, it is NOT the solution to an iron deficient lawn. In fact, applying nitrogen (fertilizer) to a "iron deficient" lawn will make the problem worse! This is because the extra nitrogen increases growth at a time or condition when the grass already cannot extract enough iron.

**So what is the secret to a green lawn in the summer?**



**IRON!** In this case we recommend several products on the market such as 'Dr. Iron'. This has the highest percentage of iron in the pellets. Check the bag for the iron content in the ingredients. Southern States, Home Depot, and Lowes should all carry it. Make sure you water it into the soil thoroughly to get it activated. And here's a bonus... it can be used around trees and shrubs to give them boost too!

# JULY

## Too Much Water?

Can your lawn survive the oppressive heat, humidity, and excessive rain this summer? Are you watering when you don't need to?

If you have followed our advice this season, your lawn will be okay. Let's look at what you should be doing in terms of ...

**Irrigation-** Let the rain irrigate your lawn. But make sure it gets at least 1 inch of water/rain every 4 days. And if you water, make sure it's early in the morning (4:30 - 8:00 AM). Don't water in the middle of the day as we have seen occasionally. This will burn out your lawn.



Hunter Rain Sensor

A Rain Sensor that turns off your system when it detects rain, is certainly a great idea and it's easy to install.

**Mowing-** mow at your highest setting to help protect the roots from the sun and also save watering.

**Fertilizer-** No fertilizer until September! Instead apply iron (e.g., "Dr. Iron) if it gets a bit yellow.

**Brown Spots?** It's probably either insects or fungus. For insects, check out the blog: [\[2\]Summer is Here... Along with New Lawn Problems](#)

If you have ruled out grubs and other insects, then we are talking lawn diseases. With the amount of rain we have had, this is certainly very possible.

Controlling lawn diseases like fungus can be one of the more challenging aspects of lawn care. Left alone, diseases such as brown patch, dollar spot, Pythium blight, or lawn rust can turn a great looking lawn into an ugly mess. Lawn diseases can be tough to identify since they can look like insect damage or fertilizer burn.



Dollar Spot

Before you can correct the situation, you need to identify the real cause of the damage so you can control it properly. Start by taking a good look at the damage to your lawn. Check the pictures included here. These are the most common problems for residential lawns. Most of these have a unique pattern and you should be able to narrow it down to a few suspects. If you are still not sure, you can contact your local county extension office, or Southern States has a wealth of information.



Brown Patch

Once you know what you are fighting, you can select the proper treatment to keep it from spreading. Most lawn diseases thrive in moist or humid conditions. Sometimes it's over-watering or watering at night that is the cause.



Pythium Blight

To help prevent lawn diseases from occurring, make sure you:

- Have proper drainage
- Water correctly to put down the correct amount (1 inch every 4 days)
- Water in the early morning to allow it to dry out during the day
- Maintain a sharp mower blade and mow at 3-3.5 inches
- Never cut wet grass

If you suspect that you have a lawn disease, you can try one of several fungicides that are available on the market. Look for a "systemic" type fungicide, meaning that it gets into the root of the grass leaf. Just about any fungicide will work, but you should not use the same one more than once. Also, let the first application in place for 14 days before applying a second one. Here are 3 products that we recommend:

1. Bayer Advanced Fungus Control
2. Spectracide Multi-Purpose Fungicide
3. Infuse Systemic Disease Control
4. Eagle 20FW (Southern States)



Bayer Fungus Control

All of your local hardware stores will have at least one of these brands.

Another Summer Nuisance: Nutsedge

If Bermuda Grass is the number 1 nasty weed, then Nutsedge is the second nastiest weed in our lawns. It is almost as hardy and just as devastating to our lawns.



This is a weed that is beginning to appear in neighborhood lawns. It has been around for the last several years and if you don't completely kill it, it will come back to haunt you the following year. Nutsedge is relatively easy to spot. It looks like normal fescue grass but has a distinctive triangular or v-shaped stem, and grows 3 times as fast as regular grass.



Nutsedge in the Lawn

Nutsedge is not just any ordinary weed. It is a weed with a nearly indestructible will to live. You can't just pull it up and dispose of it like a dandelion. Although if you pull it out when it is very small (only 3 leaves or less), and you get the tuber, you can weaken or possibly destroy it. However, this is very time-consuming and not guaranteed to work. It's particularly difficult if it is spreading throughout your yard.

Even though it looks like grass, Nutsedge is not technically a member of the grass family. It is actually a "sedge" which is a family of marsh-loving grass-like plants, usually found in wet



Nutsedge- leaf, root, tuber

areas. It is very hardy and grows through a system of underground roots and underground tubers (little balls that grow below the roots in the soil). So if you just pull out the leaf, two thirds of the weed remains and continues to reproduce in a matter of days! And, if you let the leaf grow long enough to produce the yellow seed flowers at the top, they will end up multiplying all over your (and your neighbor's) yard.

## How do you get rid of Nutsedge?



Nutsedge Stem

There are a number of products on the market that are effective in killing the leaves of the Nutsedge weed, but to really eliminate it, you must get to the roots (and tubers). This is called a "systemic" approach since it kills from within. The only product that seems to be effective is called "Dismiss".



Dismiss, the Solution

It is available at Southern States (maybe Home Depot & Lowe's). You can get it in 6 oz. and 16 oz. size concentrates, depending on how big of a problem you have. Dismiss also controls or suppresses more than 50 broad leaf weeds including wild violets, clover, dandelions, chickweed and spurge. To apply Nutsedge, mix it in a sprayer and spray the affected area. Since it needs to soak into the ground, you should spray it after it rains or you have watered the lawn, when the ground is soft and wet. You may also spray the leaves. Results can be seen after 48 hours.

## Crabgrass: "Pay Later" Time

As we mentioned in the spring, when it comes to crabgrass prevention, the old slogan of "Pay Now (put down the crabgrass preventative in the spring) or Pay Later" (suffer crabgrass in your lawn in the late summer) still fits. Well it's "Pay Later" time for a number of local lawn owners. In some cases it's not a matter of not spreading the crabgrass preventative (Scotts Turfbuilder Plus Halts), but rather not covering all of the lawn.



Crabgrass on the Edge

Here's one lawn that didn't receive a dose of preventative along the edges. And here's another that looks like it received hardly any Halts at all in the spring. Unfortunately crabgrass isn't limited by the heat. It thrives on sun, moisture (watering your lawn means watering your weeds also), and little competition. So as we have mentioned, a thick, healthy lawn is your best preventative for weeds and other intruders.

Crabgrass will begin as a single leaf, but will quickly spread sideways into beds, grass, and particularly bare spots (no competition). Once it goes to seeding, look out!



A Big Crabgrass Problem

Your grass AND your neighbor's grass will be taken over. The one thing to realize from this is that the longer you wait in the season to kill crabgrass, the worse your problem will be next year. If you do nothing during the growing season, you need to start early in the spring with your battle for control. But even if this weed has the upper hand now, don't give up!

## What should you do about the crabgrass?

There is the SLOW method and the FAST method for dealing with the elimination of crabgrass. Which one, or how much of both depend on your time, the weather (heat), and how much you have growing in your lawn.



### Slow Method: Weeding Tool

Put on a pair of gloves. Get one of those v-shaped weeding tools or similar product.

Slice into the root of the crabgrass. Pull up the weed and discard. Repeat. Yes, this is a bit time consuming, but it will get rid of the crabgrass for this year. Just take out a bucket and work for 30 minutes each day (in the cool mornings!). You will be surprised how much you can get accomplished!

### Fast Method

Spray it with a weed killer such as Ortho Weed-B-Gone. This is a bit more tricky than it sounds. You don't want to spray when the temp is above 85 degrees, or you will kill some of your good lawn in the process. Also, don't mow your lawn prior to spraying since you want as much leaf coverage as possible. And, when you do mow, use a grass catcher (don't mulch it back into the soil) since you don't want to spread any crabgrass seeds around. This is why you should pick up the dead crabgrass and dispose of it. You will have to do some reseedling in the fall (it's too hot now) also.

Of course, the best method is to put down the crabgrass pre-emergent in the spring and you won't have to face the problem now!

In Summary...

- Get an early start. Young crabgrass plants are easier to kill (and less harmful to your lawn).
- Eliminate the crabgrass before it goes to seed.
- Keep up the battle all summer! New crabgrass can start throughout the warm growing season.
- Follow label directions accurately to prevent killing good lawn.
- Don't spray when the temperature is above 85 degrees.
- Be persistent and be patient. Take care of the crabgrass now, and help prevent it from growing next season by applying a pre-emergent like "Halts" in the spring.
- Help your neighbor since his weeds may become your weeds.

**Don't wait to take action!**

# AUGUST

## Fall: Lawn Recovery Time!

The official start of Fall isn't until the last week of September. But if you wait until then, you will miss the best time to help get your lawn back into great shape. It's been a long, hot summer that has taken a toll on many of our neighborhood lawns. But the fall offers cooler, wet conditions that are ideal for lawn growth. Your main objectives for the fall should be to:

- Get rid of the weeds
- Seed the bare spots
- Fertilize for growth

We will address the seeding and fertilizing in a later blog. Before we can do either of those two items, we must get rid of the weeds and see what challenges that creates. We will look at the most common weed issues and what is required to correct them.



Active Crabgrass





Crabgrass Gone!

1) **CRABGRASS** This is probably the most prevalent weed in our neighborhood lawns, mostly due to lack of, or incomplete coverage of the crabgrass preventative in the spring. Sometimes you can't get the Scotts "Halts" on every area of your lawn. Those areas you miss mean openings for the crabgrass!

Solution: Ortho Weed-B-Gone, SpeedZone (@Southern States)

Be careful how and when you spray. Don't spray while the temps are above 85 degrees or you may end up killing the lawn also. And make sure you have 6-12 hours of rain-free weather to allow it to work (no watering).

Depending on the severity/amount of crabgrass in your lawn, you may be left with bare spots. That is where the re-seeding comes in. If the crabgrass is minimal, proper fertilizing will encourage the lawn to grow into the vacant areas. If you have a lot of dead crabgrass, you will need to dig/pull it up and back-fill with seed and topsoil. The key is to get started early so that you have excellent growing conditions to get the new patches established before the cold weather arrives.



Nutsedge in the Lawn

2) **NUTSEGE** This is the second most prevalent lawn problem I've seen. We addressed this 'crazy grass' in previous blogs. Nutsedge is difficult to totally eliminate from your lawn. I'm on my 4th application of Dismiss and am still getting a few stragglers coming up through my lawn.



The solution for Nutsedge is Dismiss. "Dismiss" is available at Southern States (maybe Home Depot & Lowe's). You can get it in 6 oz. and 16 oz. size concentrates, depending on how big of a problem you have. Dismiss also controls or suppresses more than 50 broad leaf weeds including wild violets, clover, dandelions, chickweed and spurge. Mix the concentrate in a sprayer with water and spray the affected area. Since it needs to soak into the leaf, you should spray it after it rains or after you have watered the lawn. Results can usually be seen after 24-48 hours.



Bermuda Grass Sprouting Seeds to Spread



Bermuda Grass 'Runners'

3) **BERMUDAGRASS** This is the granddaddy of all weeds (or grass look-a-likes). Unfortunately there are a number of lawns in the neighborhood that contain this weed-grass. And unfortunately, if they don't take care of their problem, it will become their neighbor's problem soon. This is a fast growing weed if left alone. It doesn't even require a lot of water! Bermudagrass grows above, below, and through your lawn. You may only see the seeds that sprout above the lawn like tiny fingers (picture shown). But be assured, the 'runners' are growing in and below your lawn. These 'runners' travel through the lawn, sending roots down every 3-4 inches. They are extremely difficult to pull up because of this. These runners can even travel under driveways to a neighboring lawn! That is why it is so important to aggressively attack this weed now.

Solution: Round Up Quik Pro

I'd love to say that there is an easy way to eliminate Bermudagrass from your lawn. Unfortunately since it is so hardy and aggressive, you may need multiple applications to totally wipe it out. It is important to attack the weed when it is growing well and before it goes dormant in the colder fall temps (Bermudagrass loves heat!). Timing is the key! You will need to apply one of several sprays over the next month and a half

so it soaks deep into the roots while it is actively growing. Here are the sprays that I recommend:

- Bayer Advanced Bermuda Grass Control
- Ornamec
- Turflon Ester
- Poast

You may find them locally or you might have to order them online. If you don't care whether you kill your surrounding fescue grass, you can use "Round-Up" several times to kill everything. I recommend trying one of the other sprays first.

Mowing Warning! With all of these weeds, if they are allowed to go to seed (you will see little 'fingers' of seeds growing up from the main weed), then do NOT blow the grass clippings back onto your lawn! You will be spreading seeds all over your (and your neighbors') lawn. Use your mower bagger to pick up the clippings and dispose of them properly.



Weeds in the Street

Help out your neighborhood...

One last thing to do this week that will help improve the curb appeal of the neighborhood- kill those weeds growing in the street. They are hardy and may require several follow-up applications. But please help us all out by spraying them with Round Up or Round Up Quik Pro (Southern States).

Your home will look better and you will help out the neighborhood!

That's it for now. Don't delay- start in now to get your lawn in shape for the fall!

# SEPTEMBER

## Give It a Breath of Fresh Air!

Labor Day is over and school has started. That means it's time to take a good look at your lawn to see what you can do to help get it back into shape for the fall. If you don't have a lot of patch repairs to perform, there are other important jobs to do to help your lawn get back into tip-top shape before winter. Two things you always hear about are "dethatching" and "aerating". Let's look at these to see if you need to do either of these this year. Because it's the early renter that gets the aerator/dethatcher when he wants it!

### AERATING

When you aerate your lawn, you 'open it up' to allow nutrients, oxygen, and moisture to enter the soil and get to the grass roots more efficiently. Over time, the clay-based soil that we have in this part of Virginia becomes compacted. The nutrients in the fertilizer that you spread can't get to the grass roots to be absorbed into the lawn and therefore aren't as effective.

#### What are the signs that you need to aerate?

1. Thinning Lawn If your yard is thinning out (or bare spots) and you can't link it to some other reason such as a shady tree or poor sprinkler coverage, then it might be soil compaction.
2. Ineffective Fertilizers As we mentioned earlier, if the fertilizer you spread isn't having much effect on your lawn, then it's time to aerate.
3. Increased Runoff after Irrigating or Rain Overly compacted soil won't absorb water effectively. Therefore it just runs off to a low spot or elsewhere. With new space ("holes") to help absorb the water into the soil, your irrigation efforts are more effective.



Aerator

## How Do I Aerate my Lawn?

Aerating involves running a special machine across your lawn several times (cross-hatch pattern) to poke thousands of holes. It will pull up plugs of soil that can be either raked up or left on the lawn to break down over a short time. You will want to irrigate your lawn prior to aerating, to soften up the soil. You can also top-seed your lawn afterwards to help thicken it.

Aerators can be rented at the Home Depot Rentals or Sunbelt Rentals (Broad St. West). They are somewhat heavy and bulky, but they certainly do the job. You may want to split the cost with your neighbors to bring down the overall cost of the rental. You should be able to tackle the job in an afternoon, which means both you and your lawn can breathe easier!

## DETHATCHING

Similar to aerating, dethatching a lawn is performed to open up the soil to let it breathe and able to accept nutrients and water better. Thatch is the layer of your lawn that exists between the grass blades and the soil. It helps to keep moisture in the lawn and protects it from the heat. Ideally you want no more than an inch of thatch in your lawn. More than that could cause the same conditions as mentioned previously: thin lawn, ineffective fertilizers, and water runoff. Too much thatch is caused by over-fertilizing, shallow watering or infrequent mowing. If you don't bag when you mow, you may be contributing to a heavier layer of thatch. One note about that- with today's mulching mower blades, the size of the grass clippings put back into the soil is so small that it's beneficial to the lawn and won't contribute much to the thatch. However, over time even these lawns may need to be dethatched.



Dethatcher

## How do I dethatch my lawn?

Again, similar to aeration, you can rent a dethatcher at your local rental centers. Dethatchers rip out all the excess thatch and debris. All you have to do is rake it up. You can also break out a rake and do the entire project by hand, but this is MUCH more labor intensive and not recommended.

When is the best time to aerate or dethatch?

The best time to perform either aeration or dethatching is about five to six weeks before the first frost. And around here, that's within the next several weeks! You want to give your lawn sufficient time to recover before the cold weather comes.

Remember! Rent early to avoid the wait and get the weekend you want!

## Fall Lawn Issues

Fall is almost here and that means it's prime lawn time. Time to repair or enrich your turf to ensure a strong, tough lawn in the future.

Where your lawn is right now and what you have done over the last several of weeks, will dictate what you need to do this weekend. Let's look at lawn conditions from best to worst and what to do about them:

### Situation 1 "My lawn is green and relatively thick with very few weeds."



Hard Work Paying Off!

Congratulations! You don't have much to do but to keep it that way into the winter. Here's your list:

- Fertilize with Scotts Turf Builder (Home Depot) or Carpet Maker with Barricade (Southern States). Make sure you aren't applying seed at this time.
- Lime with Solu-Lime (Southern States) or similar product.
- Irrigate if we don't get sufficient rain (1 inch + per week)

### Situation 2 "My lawn is mostly green, but with some bare spots and some weeds."

Sounds like you have been keeping up with your lawn so you don't have too much work ahead. Here are your steps:

- Seed those bare spots first... rake, apply a mixture of topsoil, starter fertilizer, and the best grass seed (tall fescue) you can find. Keep the areas damp for at least 7-10 days, watering 2x a day. Let the grass shoots grow through 2-3 mowings, then cut at normal height.





New Grass...Mission Accomplished!

- Fertilize the remainder of your lawn with Scotts Turf Builder (Home Depot) or Carpet Maker with Barricade (Southern States). Do NOT fertilize the new seed with Turf Builder or similar. That was why you added the Starter Fertilizer.
- Lime with Solu-Lime (Southern States) or similar product.
- Spray weed killer (Weed-B-Gone, or you can try an organic solution such as vinegar and dish washing soap in a small sprayer.)

### **Situation 3 "My lawn needs help! It's brown/light green and thin with bare spots and weeds."**



#### **Work to Do!**

You have the most work to do to bring your lawn back and give it a fair chance next spring. Here is your list:

- Start with core aeration and dethatching, leaving about ½" of thatch to decompose.
- Sow seed before the last week of September. Keep the areas damp for at least 7-10 days, watering 2x a day. Let the grass shoots grow through 2-3 mowings, then cut at normal height.
- Fertilize with a 3-1-2 fertilizer to encourage top growth and winter hardiness.
- You may also try a "weed & feed" product like Turf Builder Plus 2 in October if the weeds haven't died off



## Situation 4 (Most Difficult) "My lawn has Bermuda grass."



One Tough Weed!

Unfortunately this is one of the most difficult situations to remedy. Bermuda grass is very tough to kill because of its deep root structure (sometimes it can grow 6 feet down and under driveways!). For this situation, the only step is to spray the affected area with a total vegetation killer such as RoundUp Quik Pro. Follow up by mowing the area very low. Then, apply topsoil, starter fertilizer, and grass seed as mentioned previously. Bermuda grass can only be killed when it's actively growing. So, don't wait too much longer so you can give your newly seeded lawn time to grow before the first frost. Also, check out our other blogs about "Bermudagrass" by doing a search.

Whichever situation you are in, make sure you get out and do something this weekend. You won't find a better time... and your lawn will thank you!

# OCTOBER

## The Last Round

### Hard Work Pays Off!



Still time to Fix this!

It's Not Too Late... This lawn has a lot of problems, but there is still time. Aerate, seed, fertilize, and water.

Grass will grow as long as temps are at least 50 degrees.

Don't delay. Do it this weekend.



No Curb Appeal Here!

### Complete the Job

The grass between the sidewalk and curb is just as important as the grass next to the house. Please don't ignore it. At least kill the weeds for now and plant seed in the spring. Your neighbors will thank you!

**Mow, Mow, Mow...** If you have been following the schedule, you should be mowing about every 4 days. Make sure you adjust the mower height to cut to about 2-2.5 inches. Also, you will want to vary the direction of your cutting. If you cut in stripes one way last time, cut 90 degrees to that this time. Or, cut on a left-sloped diagonal this time, and a right-sloped diagonal next time. This makes for a better cut and your lawn doesn't grow in only one direction. (And don't forget to trim along the curb!)



Mulch, Don't Rake

## The Leaves Are Coming...

Soon the leaves will fall and your lawn will begin to look like this. That's when it's time to remove the leaves and other debris so that any newly seeded grass (or old grass) can get the much-needed sunshine to thicken up. If leaves are covering up your new grass, it can't get the sunshine it requires to grow, and will just give up. So all of your hard work will be lost. Take some time to remove the leaves from your newly seeded areas. Either rake them up regularly or mulch fallen leaves throughout the fall (can you say 'mulching mower'? ). Because, like the grass blades, leaves are a valuable source of nutrients and organic matter. If there are a lot of leaves, you may consider removing some and leaving some to mulch so as not to smother the grass.



Dead leaves will harm your lawn!

Remove whole leaves and any other debris from the lawn (including water hoses and children's toys) so the grass goes into winter free of obstruction from sunlight. Don't have a mulching mower? Home Depot or Lowe's carries blade kits to turn your mower into a mulching mower. It's worth it... no raking!



Lawn with Dead Weeds

## Gone But Not Forgotten

We haven't had our first real frost yet, but it's coming! That's when you will find out just how many weeds you have in your yard, because they will start to die off and turn brown! But at least you will know what you have to do next spring! Those brown spots are dead weeds. But they may be back in the spring!

## The Last Round

Our lawn season is slowly coming to an end. We probably have another 5-6 weeks that lawns will continue to grow. As long as it's above 50 degrees, the grass blades will grow, but at a slower rate. And the roots of your grass will continue to grow as long as the temps are above 35 degrees. That's where a good "winterizer" fertilizer comes into play.

It's important to apply that final application of fertilizer called "winterizer" sometime in November before the ground freezes. This will help decompose the leaves in your lawn over the wintertime. More importantly, it will build stronger, deeper roots during the winter so that you will see a thicker, greener lawn next spring.



Scotts Turf Builder Plus 2 with Winterguard

So, go out this weekend and pick up a few bags of fall lawn fertilizer ("winterizer"). We recommend either Scotts "Turf Builder with Winterguard" or Southern States "Carpet Maker with Avail & Wolf Trax". Either one will green up your lawn and get it ready for winter (and a quick spring green-up!).

## Option 2

If you still have a fair amount of weeds in your lawn, there is still hope for killing them off along with

fertilizing for the winter. Scotts makes a "Turf Builder Plus 2 with Winterguard" that will do the job. It's very important to following the correct procedure when applying.

- Make sure the grass is wet, either from the morning dew or your irrigation system. This will insure the fertilizer sticks to the grass blades.
- Set your spreader to the proper number as noted on the bag.
- Fill your spreader on the driveway to eliminate dropping any spilled fertilizer on your lawn.
- Apply the fertilizer around the border first, then zig-zag with overlapping paths.
- Stay off the lawn until it's dry!
- Sweep or blow off the spillover from driveways and streets.

Important! Remember to overlap your paths when you fertilize, or it may turn out looking like a football field!



Overlap your paths when you fertilize!

1. Don't apply fertilizer by hand
2. Don't apply fertilizer if rain is forecast within 24 hours. But, after the rain ends, get out there and get it down!
3. Cut your lawn to 2-2.5 inches before you fertilize. But don't scalp it!



# NOVEMBER

## Leaves B Gone !



Dead leaves will harm your lawn!

The days are getting shorter and the leaves are starting to drop in earnest to cover your lawn. As we mentioned previously, you should remove leaves and other debris so that any new grass (and old grass) can still get the much-needed sunshine to grow thicker. Leaves will harm your lawn by smothering it, if they are allowed to stay in place. So, either rake them up or mulch them. Mulched leaves, like cut grass blades, are a valuable source of nutrients and organic matter. If there are a lot of leaves on your lawn, you may consider removing some, and leaving some to mulch. Even if your grass doesn't need the cut, the leaves will need to be mulched before you get too many on the ground.

## The End is Near!

It's been a great fall for growing or revitalizing your lawn! By now you should see great results from all of your efforts. The new seed should be at least half filled in and maybe you have already cut it several times. So, it's time to start wrapping things up for the season. Here's your November checklist:

### November Checklist (aka, things to do before December)

- **MOW:** Keep your grass cut low (mulch leaves frequently)
- **WEEDS:** Spray Weed-B-Gone on "winter weeds" in beds (those weeds that always appear in the cold weather). More about this later.
- **FERTILIZE:** Fertilize your lawn with Scotts Turf Builder 'Winterguard' or Southern States Premium Fall Lawn Food
- **MOWER STORAGE:** Prepare your mower for winter storage. More about this next time.
- **WINTERIZE IRRIGATION:** Turn off your irrigation system and 'winterize'. If you haven't secured a company to 'blow out' your irrigation pipes and get your system ready for the cold weather, book one now. There are a number of reliable companies that will do this for you. It's not something that you can normally do by yourself. The cost can range from \$40 to over \$100. So pick wisely. And make sure you turn off (unplug) your control unit in the garage.

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## Wrap It Up

This is our last Lawn Club post for the season. And as such, we would like to talk about one final thing that needs to be done before you officially stop mowing and get your snow shovel ready... ‘mower maintenance’.

Your mower has been good to you all season and you should try to keep it that way with the proper maintenance for the long winter months. You will be glad you did next spring. Here are our recommendations:

### Things to Do Before Winter

- Drain the Gas from your Mower

All small gas engines should be drained each fall after the mowing season, or you may be unable to start your engine in the spring.



Gas Stabilizer

If you have some gas left over and you have to drain the tank, pour the old gas into your car’s gas tank. It will not hurt the car and is a good environmental approach to dealing with waste gas. Don’t save any old gas over the winter unless you add a gas stabilizer! Also, start your mower and run out the old gas (let it run until it stops).

- Clean the Mower’s Underside

If you have recently mowed wet grass, and as a matter of routine, you don’t regularly clean the underside of your mower, you can get an accumulation of old grass clippings stuck to the bottom. It is wise to keep the under carriage of the lawn mower relatively free of accumulated debris throughout the season and for a fresh start in the spring. A paint scraper is a good tool for this job.

### Tasks to Do Either Now or Next Spring

Most of these tasks can be done in the spring before your first mowing. It really depends on time available. Either way, some oil (old or new) must be in your mower over the winter, to keep it lubricated.

- **Oil Change-** The companies making lawn mower engines recommend changing the oil in your engine every spring. It is not a difficult job. If you let it go to every two years, the engine will be fine, but don't wait any longer to change your engine's oil.



LiquiVac Oil Extractor

**TIP!** “LiquiVac Oil Extractor” (2 Gallon) Don't you hate to drain mower oil? Well, here is our tip of the season. I found this handy little device at the Home Depot last season and it has proven to be well worth the money (about \$50). It is great for removing used oil from hard-to-reach drains on large or small engines. The easy-to-use pump tank comes with a suction hose and storage cap to save the oil you remove so you can transport it for recycling. The key advantage here is that you don't have to remove any drain plug or save used oil in a pan. Just stick the hose into the oil from the top and suction it out. It's very clean and neat! Next time you are at the Home Depot, grab one while they are still in stock. You won't be sorry. (if they are out-of-stock, order one online)

- **Air Filter** - Air filters are relatively inexpensive and easy to replace. Keep a spare handy and replace the filter according to the manufacturer's instructions. Usually you should replace the filter every two years.
- **Spark Plugs** - Spark plugs wear out. They often need replacing due to using stale fuel in your mower. Blocked air filters and oil filters can affect the performance of the spark plug. It is wise to replace the spark plug as a matter of course every season.
- **Mower Blade** - We recommend that you replace the lawn mower blade every two to three years. If you want to keep your blade for another season, sharpen it now (or in the spring). If you are handy with tools and prefer to sharpen the blade yourself, a good tool to use is from the Dremel Company. You can sharpen the entire cutting surface of your lawn mower blade in minutes with this easy-to-use attachment. It provides the optimum angle to sharpen most walk-behind rotary lawn mower blades for a healthy, beautiful lawn. Other garden tools such as shovels, shears, hoes, and axes will also gain a new lease on life.
- **Lubricate wheels and other moving parts** - Before you roll your mower into the shed, get out the WD40 and give each wheel a squirt. Also spray the underside of your mower. This will help to prevent rust from forming over the winter.

## Don't Ignore Those Winter Weeds!



PoaAnnua Winter Weeds in the Mulch

Lawn weeds like Poa Annua (Annual Bluegrass), Common Chickweed, and Henbit are “winter annuals”. This means they germinate in fall, thrive in spring and then die during summer, but not before scattering seed so the cycle can start all over again in fall. “Summer annuals”, like Crabgrass, Foxtail and Barnyardgrass, have a different cycle of germinating in spring, thriving in summer and dying just prior to winter.

Weeds like the ones shown here in the mulch are easy to kill anytime. Just hit them with either Weed-B-Gone or RoundUp. That should take care of them for the winter, but some may need another “shot” in December or March. Weeds still growing in the lawn or that sprout up in the winter, like Poa Annua (right) are a different story. You can still try Weed-B-Gone (not RoundUp since they are in the lawn). But you may want to wait until spring if you have new grass growing. You can always pull them up too, but make sure you get the roots.

Another idea I've seen to stop these winter annual weeds from invading your lawn, is to use a bag of Scotts Halts or Turf Builder with Halts. This should be done in the next week or so while the weather is fairly warm. CAUTION! If you have planted any grass seed this fall, you should not spread weed prevention in those areas, as it will keep your good grass seed from germinating.

That's it for this season! Take a look out the window at your beautiful lawn and feel good that you made the effort to make the outside of your property look better (and improved your property value at the same time!).

- The Sadler Lawn Club

**Remember- "A Beautiful Lawn Doesn't Happen By Itself!"**

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