

Turf Scientist Offers Advice On Lawn Care

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre Co.) — If you want an attractive lawn, spring is the time to work on it. But make sure you're carrying out the appropriate lawn care practices for the season, says a Penn State turfgrass scientist.

"Spring is a good time to fertilize and control certain weeds," says Dr. Peter Landschoot, assistant professor of turfgrass science in the College of Agricultural Sciences. "Other lawn care practices, such as dethatching, are best delayed until late summer or early fall."

Weed Control

"The first step in weed control is to develop a dense turf," says Landschoot. "If this fails to prevent weed infestation, herbicides can help."

Annual grass weeds such as crabgrass can be controlled by applying preemergence herbicides before weeds germinate in early to mid-spring. Some preemergence herbicides are coated on fertilizers so you can fertilize and control weeds in one operation. Suggested dates for applications in Pennsylvania are: Southeastern counties - March 15 to April 15; Northern tier and high altitude counties - April 20 to May 20; Other counties - April 1 to May 1.

"If you have too many weeds to remove by hand, you can control certain broadleaf weeds such as

dandelions and ground ivy with broadleaf herbicides," says Landschoot. "It's important to correctly identify the weeds, select the herbicide that provides the best control and apply it only when weeds are visible and actively growing."

Fertilization

"Fertilization does more to improve and maintain turf quality than any other lawn care practice," he says. "Grass normally needs more nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium than the soil can supply."

In most cases, grass needs two parts nitrogen to one part phosphorus and one part potassium. You can meet these requirements by applying a 10-6-4 fertilizer having 35 percent or more of the total nitrogen as water insoluble nitrogen (WIN) or controlled release nitrogen (CRN).

"Make the first application at the rate of 15 pounds of 10-6-4 fertilizer per 1,000 square feet in mid- to late spring," says Landschoot. "Apply the second at 15 to 20 pounds in late summer or early fall."

The only way to determine exactly how much phosphate and potassium turf requires is from a

soil test. Mailing kits for a Penn State soil test may be obtained for a nominal fee from the cooperative extension office in your county.

Liming

Most turfgrasses prefer a soil pH ranging from 6.2 to 7.0. If your soil is too acid (below 6.0) for proper turfgrass growth, apply lime in early spring, fall or late winter. "Rain and snow, combined with freezing and thawing of the ground, help to work the limestone into the soil," says Landschoot. "A soil test will tell you how much lime to apply."

Seeding

Soils may be too wet in spring to establish a new lawn from seed. Late summer to early fall usually is the best time to establish a new lawn because of drier soil and reduced weed competition. New grass also will have two cool growing seasons — fall and spring — before encountering its first period of heat stress.

Overseeding

To repair thin turf or to fill in small patches of bare soil, overseed following aeration (six to eight passes over the lawn), dethatching or by using a disk-type seeder that drops seed into slits in

the soil. "Make sure the seed comes into contact with the soil and has space to germinate and develop," he says.

Aeration

Aeration is the process of removing plugs of soil from the turf, creating an artificial system of large pores which carry moisture and nutrients into the soil. Aeration alleviates soil compaction and reduces thatch. It does not have to be performed every year.

Aerate your lawn when the soil is compacted and the thatch layer

is thick. Aerate during cool weather (early to mid-spring or late summer to early fall) so that the grass recovers quickly. Adequate moisture is necessary for the aerator tines to penetrate the turf and remove the plugs. The plugs can be broken apart once they have dried.

"If you already have applied a preemergence herbicide, wait until early fall to aerate, as the practice can reduce the effectiveness of the herbicide," says Landschoot.

Longwood Gardens

KENNETT SQUARE (Chester Co.) — Longwood Gardens continues its program of free gardening demonstrations with a spring program of six presentations by Longwood experts on a variety of seasonal gardening techniques. The spring series includes "How to Prune Grapes" on March 10, "How to Prune Roses" on March 24, "How to Divide Perennials" on April 14, "How to Plant Early Vegetables" on April 28, "How to Plant a Container Garden" on May 12, and "How to Prune Azaleas" on May 19. The demonstrations coincide with home gardening

schedules and are presented by Longwood's gardeners. Participants will observe the practical how-to's of gardening from the experts in time to apply the techniques at home. All sessions begin at 2:30 pm.

The series begins with a March 10 demonstration on pruning grapes to establish structure and increase yield. On March 24 rose growers will get an early look at pruning techniques for additional blooms and disease prevention. Techniques for dividing perennials to increase vigor as well as provide additional plants will be

Cook's Question

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ANSWER — Carol Grove, Sommerville, Va., would like recipes using basic cookie mix. Thanks to Susan Fadeley for sending recipes.

Basic Cookie Mix

- 9 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ cup double-acting baking powder
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cream of tartar
- 4½ cups sugar
- 2 cups shortening

Drop Cookies

- 4 cups mix
- ½ cup milk
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Mix until well blended. Drop by tablespoonful on greased cookie sheet. Flatten slightly. Bake in a 375 degree oven for 10 to 12 minutes. Makes 4 dozen.

Variations:

- Add ½ cup chocolate chunks OR
- ½ cup chopped nuts, dates, or raisins OR
- 1 tablespoon grated orange rind and ½ cup chopped dates and raisins.

Oatmeal Cookies

- 4 cups mix
- ½ cup milk
- 1 egg
- 1 cup quick oats
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ cup raisins
- ½ cup chopped nuts

Mix first 5 ingredients until well blended. Add raisins and nuts. Drop by tablespoonful on greased cookie sheet. Bake in 375 degree oven for 10 to 12 minutes. Makes 4 dozen.

Frosted Almond Cookies

Substitute almond extract for vanilla in drop cookies and bake as directed.

Frosting:

- 2 cups confectioner's sugar
- 4 tablespoons baking cocoa
- 4 tablespoons hot water
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Almond halves, blanched

Combine sugar and baking cocoa. Add water and vanilla. Put about 1 teaspoonful on each cookie with an almond half in the center. Bake in 375 degree oven for 10 to 12 minutes. Makes 4 dozen.

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