



Caring for your Lawn and Landscaping



SPRING

Spring Aeration

The soil in your yard can become compacted with time. This compacted soil can significantly affect the health of your lawn. The solution to this problem is lawn aeration. What is lawn aeration? Lawn aeration is the softening of regions of the soil in your yard to enable easier penetration of water, air and nutrients into your turf's root zone. To determine if your lawn needs to be aerated, cut several small sections of grass from your lawn. Make certain that each area you remove is about six to seven inches deep. Once the grass has been removed, it can be evaluated. Look at the depth of the roots. Relatively short grass roots, 1-2" long, indicate the need for aeration. Aeration is most effective in late spring when the grass is actively growing and when the roots are actively growing. If you have a modest turf area, you can use a manual aerator to do the job yourself. For larger lawns, however, you may need to hire a professional lawn service to use a powered core aerator. Optionally, you can rent a core aerator at a tool rental center in your area.

Pre-emergent Herbicides & Fertilizers

When they are applied in early spring, pre-emergent herbicides prevent weed germination and weed growth by coating the seeds and hindering the growth of any surviving seedlings before the plant has a chance to mature. (Remember to be careful when handling all chemicals. Always use heavy, thick rubberized gloves when handling all poisons and chemicals to treat weeds, insects, as well as fertilizers. The handling of these chemicals should never be taken lightly, as many are very dangerous and can be highly toxic. You should also shower after handling chemicals such as these).

To keep your lawn looking its best, you should follow a consistent fertilization program. Fertilizer that is applied regularly and properly will lead to a thicker, more healthy lawn. A healthy lawn reduces the chances of soil erosion, it filters pollutants and provides a natural cooling region around your home. It also absorbs significant amounts of carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) from the air. Additionally, a lawn will be less likely to suffer from weed, insect, and disease problems when it is fertilized with the right amount of fertilizer on a regular basis. Most fertilizers contain three nutrients - nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium - in addition to several other secondary nutrients. Nitrogen promotes strong color and top growth, phosphorus stimulates root development, and potassium helps with disease resistance and with water retention. For the best results, your lawn should receive these nutrients at appropriately timed treatments throughout the year.

Clean out the landscape beds

To ensure that you do the best job of cleaning out of your landscape beds that you can, you should start from the edges and work your way inwards. At the edges of the beds, pull out any grass that is growing into the bed. Remove the dead leaves and any other debris that have blown into the beds. With the mulch cleaned up,



you'll have a better view of any weeds. You can make the weeding easier by first watering the bed to loosen the soil around the roots. To get the entire weed, root and all, remember to pull the weeds slowly and hold onto them firmly.

Mulching

If you often have problems with diseased plants, you may want to remove and replace mulch around such plants as azaleas, roses, and camellias because disease spores and insects may have over-wintered in this material. If you think disease or insects are not a problem you may just want to add more mulch. Sometimes you may also have to get rid of old mulch first if it is too deep or starting to cover plant materials. Rake it out and dispose of it, or compost it, if it isn't sourced from treated wood. Make sure to pull any visible weeds to discourage their growth before putting down new mulch. While mulch can help control weeds, it also can inhibit the growth of landscape plants if it is applied too deeply. Take care to spread out just the right amount of mulch. For mulches composed of big chunks, keep it to about 3-4" deep. Finer mulches are appropriate at about 1-2" deep. While you're spreading out the mulch, be sure to pull it away from plant stems so that bugs and other pests can't walk right onto your plants.

Scalping

It is recommended that Bermuda and Zoysia lawns be scalped each spring. Scalping is the removal of dormant, dead turf. It promotes the early greening of a lawn and helps prevent thatch and weed problems throughout the summer. To scalp your lawn, lower your mower blades to their lowest setting, mow the lawn, and bag the clippings. Depending on the height of your grass and the type of mower, you may need to mow more than once, gradually lowering the blade each time. If your lawn is uneven, you may want to raise the blades a little in the bumpy areas so you don't gouge into the soil. Do not scalp your lawn until all chance of frost is past. Do not scalp cool season grasses like fescue or bluegrass.

SUMMER

Weed Control

Although you probably treated for weeds in the spring, weeds can return any time throughout the summer. Your options for their removal are manually pulling them or using chemical herbicides to poison them. plant development and cell division.

If you choose the chemical option, post-emergent herbicides, such as a Roundup kill weeds that are actively growing. These herbicides are absorbed through the leaves of the plant, and they interfere with In general, liquids tend to work better than granules, because they tend to stick better to plant surfaces. In general, you will likely obtain better results when you treat your lawn when the ambient air temperature is between 60-80 degrees, and when there are little to no winds and when no rain forecasted for at least two days after the application.

Watering

According to the Agrilife extension of Texas A&M, approximately 50% of landscape water is wasted due to over watering, inefficient watering practices and broken or poorly maintained irrigation systems. That being said, it is prudent to keep your sprinkler system, if you have one, adjusted and well-maintained. Generally it can cost as little as \$100 to have a licensed sprinkler repair company come out and evaluate and adjust your sprinkler system. This small investment will go a long way toward having a healthy lawn and healthy landscaping while having reasonable water bill. Once you have had your sprinkler system serviced, it is would be a good time to set the timer on your sprinkler system to water 2 times per week for a total of about 1 inch per week. For your turf grass, the site, watermyyard.org, can even email you an estimate of the proper amount of time to water based on your location in DFW and the type of grass you have.

You can also judge how much water your lawn is getting by using a rain gauge and emptying it on the same day each week. When temperatures start to go higher, grass needs less water as it goes dormant. In the heat of the summer, it's best to let the growth slow down naturally rather than trying to stimulate more growth with watering. Remember to water earlier in the day instead of in the heat of the afternoon. The water will be less likely to evaporate quickly in the morning, leaving it around longer to benefit your lawn. On the flip side, watering in the evenings can encourage more turf diseases, such as brown patch, red thread, and dollar spot, which thrive in moist conditions. Conserving water and protecting waterways are important things to consider when you are watering. For the most efficient use of water, water just a few days per week for long periods, rather than several times per week at shorter periods. This longer duration watering, tends to drive the water deeper into the soil, which encourages the grasses' roots to extend deeper into the soil in search of moisture, which causes the roots to grow deeper and as a result, be more drought tolerant.

Mowing

Mowing is one of the single most important aspects of yard care. How you mow your lawn will significantly affect the way it looks. Proper mowing will improve the quality of your lawn, increase its health and decrease the number of weeds. For best results, follow these tips:

- Mow often enough so that you only remove 1/3 of the grass blade each time.
- If your lawn grows too much between mowings and you get a little behind, raise the mowing height so that you don't remove more than 1/3 of the grass blade, and then gradually lower the height on the next mowings.

- Mow frequently enough so that you do not have to bag the clippings.
- Mow at the proper height (see table below).
- Keep your mower blades sharp.
- Mow in a different pattern every time you mow.
- Keep your mower properly maintained

Proper mowing height is essential for the health of your grass; use the table below as a guideline of optimum height. Generally in the DFW Metroplex, we have two types of grass: Bermuda and St. Augustine grasses.

Grass Species	Mow Height
Common Bermuda	1.5"-2.5"
Hybrid Bermuda	0.5"-1.5"
Centipedegrass	1.5"-2.0"
Kentucky Bluegrass	2.5"-4.0"
Tall Fescue	2.5"-4.0"
St. Augustine	2.5"-4.0"
Zoysia	0.75"-2.5"

FALL

Planting

Begin planting trees and shrubs around this time. Planting in autumn allows them time to grow roots and transition into the garden. As temperatures begin to cool, plants need less water. Adjust your watering schedule for lawns, borders, and containers. Pay close attention to containers, as they can become water-logged, but are can also dry out depending on the fall weather and temperatures.

Cooler weather

Fall brings back ideal growing conditions for your lawn. Cooler nights, warm but not hot days, rainfall and morning dew are about as good as it gets for grass. The lawn is ready to grow again, and is looking for the nutrients it needs to recover from summer damage. Some experts will say this is the single most important lawn feeding of the year. Apply your final feeding of a good lawn food before the winter months, when grass is preparing for its winter dormancy. This will strengthen roots and increase nitrogen storage for the early spring green up and a healthier lawn next year.

Don't Prune in the Fall

Because decay fungi spread their spores profusely in the fall and healing of wounds seems to be slower in fall, this is a good time to leave your pruning tools in storage and wait to prune in the winter. This is according to the Arbor Day Society.

WINTER

Winter Pruning

Pruning during dormancy is the most common practice. It results in a vigorous burst of new growth in the spring and should be used if that is the desired effect. It is usually best to wait until the coldest part of winter has passed. Some species, such as maple, walnuts and birches, may “bleed”—when the sap begins to flow. This is not harmful and will cease when the tree leafs out.

Pruning Flowering Trees to Enhance Flowering

If your purpose for pruning is to enhance flowering: for trees that bloom in spring, prune when their flowers fade, for trees and shrubs that flower in mid to late summer, should be pruned in winter or early spring.

Consider Xeriscaping

If your homeowners association allows, consider xeriscaping parts or all of your lawn. Xeriscaping is the selection and the growth of plants whose water and light requirements are appropriate for the local climate. In Texas, the plant choices tend to be drought-tolerant native plants. With xeriscaping landscaping design, more thought and consideration is taken in the selection of plants, so as to minimize any water loss to evaporation and to run-off. The plants used in xeriscaping depend on the local climate. Xeriscaping is slightly different than natural landscaping, because the emphasis in xeriscaping is on the selection of plants for maximum water conservation, and not necessarily the selection of native plants.

In Closing

As climate change appears to be becoming an issue all around the world, it is a great time to be more educated and knowledgeable on using our resources more wisely and more effectively. I say: Good luck!



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