

5 STEPS FOR SUMMER LAWN PREPARATION:

BEFORE WE COVER THESE TIPS, LET'S REVIEW WHAT YOUR LAWN IS SUBJECT TO OVER THE SUMMER MONTHS.

COMPACTION IS THE RESULT OF YOUR LAWN COMING SUBJECT TO HIGH FOOT TRAFFIC (I.E. HUMANS, ANIMALS) AND EVEN LAWN MOWING EQUIPMENT. COMPACTION IS INCREASED WHEN THE GROUND IS MOIST OR WET. COMPACTION REDUCES THE SPACE WITHIN THE SOIL WHERE WATER, NUTRIENTS AND OXYGEN NORMALLY ACCUMULATE, WHICH IS CRITICAL FOR GROWTH AND HEALTH.

THATCH IS AN ACCUMULATION OF DEAD ORGANIC MATTER (I.E. GRASS CLIPPINGS, LEAVES), THAT LIES BETWEEN THE GRASS. WHILE LIGHT LAYERS OF THATCH ARE GOOD FOR A LAWN, BY PROVIDING A NUTRIENTS AND WATER RETENTION, TOO MUCH CAN DEPRIVE THE SOIL AND GRASS FROM THESE SAME THINGS. WATER IS NOT ABLE TO PENETRATE THE SOIL BECAUSE THATCH ACTS AS A SHIELD. IN ADDITION, THIS BARRIER PROVIDES A GOOD NESTING PLACE FOR INSECTS.

WHILE THESE STEPS WILL REQUIRE A BIT OF TIME AND MONEY TO CARRY OUT, DOING SO EARLY IN THE LAWN GROWTH PROCESS WILL ACTUALLY SAVE YOU TIME AND MONEY AS THE SEASON PROGRESSES.

STEP 1 – PREPARATION MOWING:

THIS STEP WILL MAKE THE SUBSEQUENT STEPS EASIER TO DO. PREP THE LAWN BY MOWING THE GRASS, WITH THE DECK OF THE MOWER AT THE LOWEST POSSIBLE POINT, WITHOUT COMPLETELY SCALPING THE GROUND. THIS WILL ALLOW YOU TO MORE EASILY REMOVE THATCH, AERATE, AS WELL AS TO EXPOSE MORE SOIL FOR OVERSEEDING AND FERTILIZING, AS DESCRIBED BELOW.

STEP 2 – DETHATCH AND/OR AERATE:

TO REMOVE THIS EXCESSIVE LAYER OF THATCH (ANY AMOUNT GREATER THAN 1/4 INCH), USE A GARDEN RAKE. THE HEAVY GAGE TINES WILL ALLOW YOU TO BREAK UP THE THICK MATTING OF THATCH. IF YOU HAVE ACCESS TO A PULL BEHIND DETHATCHER OR CAN RENT A MOTORIZED DETHATCHER, DO SO AS IT WILL SAVE YOU A LOT OF TIME. IN ADDITION, THE WORK WILL BE MORE EFFECTIVE. ONCE THE THATCH IS BROKEN-UP, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMOVE THIS DEAD ORGANIC MATTER BY SWEEPING THE LAWN.

WHILE AERATION IS/HAS TYPICALLY BEEN CARRIED OUT IN THE FALL, MANY ARE DOING IT IN THE EARLY SPRING AS ANOTHER STEP IN LAWN PREPARATION. THE AERATION PROCESS INVOLVES PLACING HOLES IN THE GROUND, WHICH HELPS THE SOIL TAKE IN SEED, FERTILIZER, WATER AND INSECTICIDES. BOTH SPIKE AND CORE AERATORS ARE AVAILABLE. CORE AERATION IS BEST AS IT ACTUALLY REMOVES A PORTION OF THE SOIL, WHERE AS SPIKE AERATION ACTUALLY DRIVES THE SOIL INTO THE GROUND, CAUSING MORE COMPACTION. A DEPTH OF AT LEAST 3 INCHES IS DESIRED. FOR CORE AERATION, SIMPLY LEAVE THE PLUGS ON THE GROUND AS THEY WILL BREAK DOWN IN A MATTER OF WEEKS.

STEP 3 – OVERSEEDING:

TO INCREASE THE TURF DENSITY OF AN EXISTING LAWN, OVERSEED AFTER PERFORMING STEPS 1 & 2. THE INCREASED SURFACE AREA FROM DETHATCHING AND/OR AERATION, WILL ALLOW SEEDS TO GERMINATE MORE EFFECTIVELY. THE RATE IN WHICH TO APPLY SEED, IS DEPENDENT UPON THE TYPE OF GRASS PRESENT IN YOUR LAWN. ON AVERAGE, ONE CAN EXPECT TO APPLY 1 LB OF SEED PER 150 SQ FT. THE USE OF A BROADCAST OR DROP SEED SPREADER IS PREFERRED. IF USING A DROP SEED SPREADER, IT IS BEST TO APPLY IN 2 APPLICATIONS, PERPENDICULAR TO EACH OTHER, TO ENSURE EVEN DISTRIBUTION OF SEED. AFTER SEEDING, THE USE OF AN ORGANIC MATTER (I.E. PEAT MOSS) WILL HELP THE GROUND TO RETAIN WATER WHILE GERMINATION BEGINS. WATERING, ON AVERAGE, SHOULD BE APPLIED AT A RATE OF 1 INCH PER DAY FOR 3-4 WEEKS. SEE OUR PAPER ON WATERING FOR MORE DETAILS.

STEP 4 – FERTILIZING:

TO HELP YOUR GRASS GET THE PROPER NUTRIENTS THAT IT NEEDS, APPLY FERTILIZER. FERTILIZER CONTAINS 3 MAIN MACRONUTRIENTS (NITROGEN, PHOSPHORUS & POTASSIUM) ALONG WITH OTHER MICRONUTRIENTS. WHILE TURF NEEDS ALL 3 MACRONUTRIENTS TO GROW, NITROGEN IS TYPICALLY NEEDED IN LARGER QUANTITIES THAN THE OTHER 2. WHEN APPLYING FERTILIZER, THE RATE TO APPLY SHOULD NOT EXCEED 1 LB OF NITROGEN PER 1000 SQUARE FEET OF TURF AREA. TO HELP WITH WEEDS AND INSECTS, YOU CAN PURCHASE FERTILIZER WITH THESE COMPONENTS PRESENT. A SLOW RELEASE GRANULAR FERTILIZER IS RECOMMENDED TO PROVIDE A STEADY SUPPLY OF NUTRIENTS. IF LOOKING TO FERTILIZE THROUGH THE SUMMER MONTHS, APPLICATIONS SHOULD BE SPACED OUT A MONTH APART, WITH THE LAST BEING IN THE EARLY FALL, BEFORE GRASS GOES DORMANT. WATERING SHOULD NOT OCCUR ANY SOONER THAN 24 HOURS AFTER APPLICATION.

STEP 5 – MOWING:

WHEN CONDUCTING WEEKLY LAWN MOWING, INCLUDING EDGING & TRIMMING, MAKE SURE THAT YOUR LAWN EQUIPMENT IS WELL MAINTAINED. MOWING BLADES SHOULD BE CHECKED ROUTINELY AND SHARPENED OR REPLACED, AS DULL BLADES TEAR GRASS AS OPPOSED TO ACTUAL CUTTING. OPTIMAL TURF GRASS HEIGHT IS BASED ON THE TYPE, WITH MOST GRASSES HAVING AN OPTIMAL HEIGHT OF 2 TO 3 INCHES. IN NO CASE, SHOULD MORE THAN 1/3RD OF THE GRASS HEIGHT BE REMOVED AT ONE TIME. CUTTING IT ANY SHORTER LEAVES YOUR GRASS SUSCEPTIBLE TO EXCESSIVE WATER LOSS, DISEASE AND INCREASED THATCH DUE TO EXCESSIVE AMOUNTS OF GRASS CLIPS.