



The Real Dirt

August, 2011

A thousand plants: one beautiful lawn :

You may not realize it but if you keep a lawn, you are tending hundreds, even thousands of little individual plants. The plants you choose and how you care for them will show up in the overall health and beauty of your lawn.



They're not all the same! If your light is marginal or you don't plan to water much fescues are your best bet. Fine fescue however, doesn't stand up well to traffic. Choose one of the other types of grasses for lawn areas that take a lot of wear and tear.

Perennial ryegrass is quick to germinate and protect the soil -- an important consideration on slopes that are vulnerable to erosion. Kentucky bluegrass is the slowest. The fescues fall between the two.

Kentucky bluegrass spreads by underground stems called rhizomes. It forms a tough sod. When damaged, the rhizomes can creep back in to cover the bare spot. The other grasses are bunch grasses that don't spread as well or form as dense a sod.

Most often when you purchase grass, you are purchasing a mix of the above varieties. Here are some mixes that you are able to buy along with the best use for that mix.

Sunny, medium- to high-maintenance lawn:

- 65% Kentucky bluegrass blend (several different varieties)
- 15% perennial ryegrasses
- 20% fine fescues

Sunny, low-maintenance lawn:

- 65% fine fescue blend
- 15% perennial ryegrasses
- 20% Kentucky bluegrass blend

Shady areas:

- 100% fine fescue blend

Grass is what it is fed. Lawns are not too different from our bodies. They want and need nutritious food. If you are using synthetic fertilizers, it's like feeding your lawn junk food. A healthy lawn comes from a healthy soil. Your soil should be teeming with life.

Focus on fall when feeding soil. For most lawns, a single application of compost in fall about two weeks after the last mowing is sufficient. Avoid early-spring applications. Research shows that these applications do not really enhance spring green-up compared with late-fall applications.

Fertilizing healthy lawns in spring just increases top growth (and mowing chores) at the expense of root growth. This lush, succulent growth encouraged by spring fertilization makes the plant more susceptible to insects and diseases.

One easy way to fertilize your grass plants in fall is to mix good compost with the best grass seed that you can

afford and apply this mixture as a fall topdressing. Throw some organic fertilizers into the mix such as blood meal and bone meal. If your soil tends to be acidic, add a bit of limestone (calcium) at the same time. Apply this topdressing carefully. If you are adding compost at the same time, spread your fall application with a rake.

Lawns that receive water often count on a steady supply of water and don't put down long roots and are susceptible to burning should the watering be reduced. Lawns that are watered when they need it, will put down long roots and are able to withstand dry periods much better.



Proper mowing gives grass a competitive advantage over weeds and helps keep your lawn healthy. For a healthy, low-maintenance lawn, don't take off more than a third of the grass growth at one time (or three inches). Longer grass helps cool the soil surface, reducing water loss from the soil and decreasing competition from warm-season weeds, such as crabgrass. Clippings will help return nutrients to the soil.

Take care of your grass plants and they will provide you with a lush green lawn that will be the envy of your neighbours.

*Carol Dunk,
Master Gardener*



Master Gardeners of Simcoe County

August TO DO List

- Reduce fertilization to allow plants ample time to harden off before winter.
- Continue to water during dry spells.
- Deadhead annuals and perennials to encourage new growth.
- Keep an eye open for pests that may be planning to hibernate in the debris around your plants.
- Seed areas of the lawn that are thin or dead. Keep the seed well watered while germinating.
- Propagate from seeds or cuttings.
- Some perennials may be ready to divide.

Garden Humour:

The real meaning of Plant Catalog terminology:

“May require Support” means your daughter’s engineering degree may pay off.

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Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Simcoe County
Volume 1, Number 4

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Contact therealdirt@bell.ca

Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

COMING EVENTS

August 16th, 2011 Master Gardener Meeting 4.00pm

Trip to Collingwood Aboratum followed by Meeting

TBA Fix up session for The Bob Rumball Centre.

UPCOMING ISSUE

Spring Bulbs

By growing flowers in our windows we contribute towards the education and refinement of society at large –

F. W. Burbidge

Gardener's Alphabet

A is for Acidic Soil with a Ph of 6 or less. Excellent for Rhododendrons. But for most other plants amend the soil with lime to increase alkalinity.

Ask a Master Gardener books containing answers to your most common gardening questions are available at any of these speaking engagements for only \$10 or Gardening Guides on request. Valuable references for you or as gifts for a gardening friend! Either e-mail jonbon@bell.net to order or call 705-436-5292



For information on arranging a lecture for your group please contact Joan Nieman-Agapas 705-721-9088. For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website: and follow the links to

Simcoe County Master Gardeners.