



Sleeping Bermuda Lawns Need Some Winter Care

By Steve Fazio

Lawns will be emerging from their long winter dormancy within the next few months and now is the time to make preparations for their care throughout the summer months.

Proper care of lawns — from dormancy through the active growing season — is dependent upon MANAGEMENT. Yes — man's effort will determine whether the lawn will be a vigorous, weed-free, luxuriant green carpet or an infested weed patch. A knowledge of the basic principles of lawn management will enable a gardener to cope with the many facets of growing a beautiful lawn regardless of the variety used in the home grounds.

Retain Some Moisture

During the dormant winter period one should never allow the soil in the lawn area to become too dry. Winter rains are normally sufficient to satisfy the moisture requirements of lawns in most areas of the state, but if rains are sparse and soil examination reveals dryness, an irrigation should be applied to prevent drying injury to the roots or rhizomes.

Shallow frequent watering during the active growing season may cause a buildup of salts in the upper surface of the soil. Yellowing of the foliage and poor vigor are results of this

type of irrigation on heavy soils. Light sprinklings are permissible if an occasional heavy watering is applied to leach the salts to a lower depth, thus creating a more favorable condition for the roots.

Fertilization of the lawn area prior to the onset of the dormant season is often overlooked and "starved" lawns make poor recovery the following spring. The gardener should be aware of the approximate date of the average first frost in his particular area and then time the fertilizer application four to six weeks ahead of the first frost. The lawn will absorb the nutrients during this late period of the season and when it emerges in the spring it will be in a vigorous condition to start growing.

Spring Fertilization

If heavy rains were prevalent during the winter months, another fertilizer application is suggested in early spring as soon as new growth is visible. On light, sandy soils, leaching caused by winter rains may deplete the supply of fertilizer which was applied during the late fall.

Additional fertilizer may be needed if the lawn tends to go "off color" (light green) during the growing season. A summer application is often

necessary when growth is rapid and the lawn is making a heavy demand on the available soil nutrients.

Mowing is an extremely important management practice which can cause serious damage to the lawn when done improperly. First, the mower blades should be sharpened to make clean cuts. Dull blades crush rather than cut, and the ends of the leaves die back, giving the lawn a brownish appearance for several days.

Too High to Too Low

Permitting the lawn to grow to a height of several inches before mowing results in dense shading of the lower portion of the plants. This results in a tender, succulent growth which is subject to sunburning when exposed to sunlight after mowing. Recovery will be slow, especially during mid-summer, and weed seeds will be given an opportunity to sprout and gain a foothold in this type of environment.

Some lawn varieties produce leaf blades near the top portion of stems when allowed to grow too tall. The lower portion of these plants will be devoid of foliage, due to heavy shading. When the tops are mowed off, the remaining stems are without any protective leaves near the base.

Recovery from this type of mowing is dependent upon new stems and leaves developing to replace those which were clipped. Frequent mowings at a given height encourage leaf development near the base of the stems and sunburning will not be a factor. If the lawn is permitted to grow approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inches between mowings, recovery afterward will be rapid; germination of weed seeds will be discouraged, and the vigor of the lawn will not be interrupted.

Lawns Must Breathe

Bare spots in lawn play areas caused by heavy usage require special care to encourage growth of the grass. Lack of growth may be due to a compacted soil condition. (Reduced air spaces and cemented soil particles). Prior to the emergence of the lawn, these bare spots should be aerified (machine which removes small plugs of soil) or renovated several inches deep to break up the crusted soil surface. Organic matter is incorporated to create a more friable condition. The area is then seeded or sprigged in the same manner as a newly planted lawn.

Yes, management — throughout the year — is the factor which can decide whether you'll have a beautiful lawn or a weed patch!

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