

## Time To Start Working On Lawns

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

With the official start to spring just a few days away, and having now had some spring like weather, it is time to get started working on lawns. Last summer was hard on lawns. We saw turf stress levels unlike anything we've seen in over 50 years. Even heavily watered lawns were stressed. In light of above average precipitation so far this year, there's no reason to believe that the drought has broken yet. This brings some real challenges to lawn management.

Reseeding or overseeding are going to be high on the list for many homeowners. Before you spend a dime going down this road, there's one very simple question to ask though. Are you willing to spend the dollars on watering that yard from now until late June assuming we'll have the water resources to do it? If your answer is "no", then don't spend the money reseeding. If you are going to plant grass seed, you need regular rainfall or regular irrigation to get the seed germinated and growing. Right now, I'm not overly optimistic that rain is going to be a regular enough occurrence to count on.

If you are going to go ahead and do some seeding, keep in mind that you CAN NOT apply a crabgrass preventer. The crabgrass preventers will also keep your grass seed from germinating. Apply fertilizer, if you didn't last fall, but no herbicides this spring of any kind. Seeding needs to be done from now through late April. Seeding in May just doesn't seem to give the plants a chance to get established before the summer heat hits!

If you aren't reseeding, then we're coming up on the first window of opportunity to apply crabgrass preventer. If you are using one of the newer products, namely Barricade (proflam) or Dimension (dithiopyr), check the label, and you use the heavier season long rate, applying in late March is preferred and you will not need to make a second application. If you are using any other product then read the label to see when to apply and when re-applications will be needed. These are all crabgrass preventers and have to be applied, and activated by rainfall prior to the crabgrass seed germinating to be effective.

We are going to see more crabgrass this year because of the drought and heat stress from last year. Many lawns lost grass cover and have bare patches. Anytime that there is bare soil there will be weeds of some kind start to fill in. Mother Nature doesn't like bare ground. If you had a little crabgrass last year, you will have more this year.

If you didn't apply broadleaf weed preventer last fall, then you need to get a weed and feed type product, or just a broadleaf weed killer, applied soon. Once those pretty little flowers start to show up, soon, it becomes very hard to control them, and they will make seed regardless of what you do.

One of the most important management considerations with lawns at any time, but especially in periods of drought, is to mow them as tall as possible. Setting your mower to a higher setting will increase leaf blade length. Longer leaf blades allow for a larger root system and more shading of the ground. Shaded ground will be cooler, slowing down water loss, and creating less opportunity for weed seeds to germinate.

The Extension Office will be hosting a lawn clinic, Lawn 9-1-1; Emergency Management for Your Drought Stressed Lawn, on Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup>. It will start at 7:00 p.m. and will be held at the 4-H/Sr. Citizen's Building, 1025 S. Spring Valley Road. The program is free and no registration is required.