

Early Spring Lawn Chores

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Many years, by the time we've reached mid-March, we've mowed our lawns at least once. At the rate things are going, I know I can make it at least another week and maybe clear til the first of April! Green growth of any kind has been slow to make an appearance this year, but with warmer temperatures we are finally starting to see some green in these lawns. But just because we're getting a little green grass showing, don't go too crazy with the yard chores just yet!

For many homeowners, the first thing that they want to do is drop the mower as low as it will go and mow off all of that old dead grass left over from last year. The idea is that if you get rid of that old dead grass, the lawn will green up sooner. Well, it won't actually green up sooner, it'll just look like it has. The problem with this is two fold. First, by cutting the grass low you can actually expose the crowns of the plant to potential cold weather injury if this fickle weather sends the thermometers heading the other direction. Secondly, by mowing low you expose more soil to sunlight and this is a great way to get more weeds growing! It's okay to drop the mower one half inch lower than normal on your first cutting, but then immediately put it back up to the full summer height for the second cutting.

If you did not get your lawn fertilized last fall, now would be a good time to do that, but only if you are using straight fertilizer. If you also didn't treat for broadleaf weeds last fall, those pretty little weeds that will be blooming so brightly in a few more weeks are just now also starting to grow. I'd like to wait another week before we start treating for broadleaf weeds and let them get a few more leaves and bigger leaves. It's important that whatever broadleaf weed killer you are using (liquid herbicide or weed and feed granular products) be sure to read and follow all the label directions. In general, it's best to treat with herbicides when it is above 50 degrees so that the weeds will be more active in taking up the herbicide.

It is still a little early to be treating with crabgrass preventers. Crabgrass and foxtail are warm season grasses that start over from seed every spring. It needs to be much warmer before those seeds start to germinate and grow. If you are using newer crabgrass control products like Dimension (Dithiopyr) or Barricade (Prodiamine) then you can apply these the last week of March. Both of these are very long lasting crabgrass preventers and actually take a little more time following rainfall or irrigation to become activated.

If you are using older generation crabgrass preventers (virtually anything else) then you probably want to wait until mid April or about the time that the redbud trees start to bloom. You will also probably need to apply a second treatment in six to eight weeks to obtain true season long control. Read and follow the label directions concerning re-treatment with these products. However, if you need to do any grass seeding or overseeding this spring don't use any crabgrass preventer as it will also prevent your turf grass seed from germinating. As to grass seeding, it's still a little early for that as well. I wouldn't want to do any reseeding or overseeding until about the second week of April at the earliest.

It's been a long cold winter and everyone is anxious to see green grass and sunshine. But let's just remember that spring is slow in coming and we don't want to push it too hard too soon. So leave the lawnmower in the garage and go back in the house and watch some more basketball games!