

Gearing Up For The Spring Lawn Care Season

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

If you are one of the few homeowners that have a buffalograss, zoysia grass or Bermudagrass lawn, you can hit the snooze button now. Your lawn season is still many weeks away from starting. But for all the rest of us, those of us with tall fescue or bluegrass lawns, March brings the start of the lawn care season. Before you start doing much of anything in the yard however, the first step should be to make sure you've raked up all of those small branches that were ripped off trees with the Thanksgiving ice storm. Do that now before the grass really starts to grow to save yourself frustration later on in the spring.

For spring lawn work, we have to go through a series of questions to determine what you need to do or will want to do. The first question is, are you going to do any reseeding or overseeding this spring? If so, do not apply any weed control of any kind; don't apply a crabgrass preventer, don't apply a dandelion killer. All of these products can cause issues with trying to get new grass seed germinated and growing. I generally don't like to plant grass seed until after the first day of spring, so basically wait until after March 21st. But make sure to get the grass seed in the ground by the end of April. Those young plants need to be well enough established before hot weather hits so they will be able to survive our Kansas summer.

Did you apply fertilizer and broadleaf weed (dandelions) killer last fall? If you did, and as you walk about your lawn you aren't finding any little weed seedlings, then you don't need to apply any this spring. If you applied weed control too early last fall, you may find a nice crop of small weeds requiring another treatment now. This can be applied just about anytime that the temperatures are above 50 degrees and predicted to stay there for several hours. You can use either a liquid herbicide or granular. Either one will work fine as long as you follow the label directions. If you fertilized last fall, then a liquid product may be better and will prevent you from over fertilizing your lawn resulting in you having to mow more frequently in the coming weeks.

The question I've already started being asked is if it is too early to apply crabgrass preventer. The short answer is, yes. Crabgrass is a warm season grass and the soil needs to be a lot warmer than it is right now. A few warm days, like we saw last weekend, isn't enough to germinate crabgrass. It normally won't start germinating until the end of April. You can't wait too late though as it takes a few days, to a few weeks, after application, along with rainfall or irrigation, for the herbicide to become activated. If you are using a preventer with one of the newer products like Barricade (proflam) or Dimension (dithiopyr) then you can start applying those around mid to late March. These have very good long season activity. If you are using preventers with other active ingredients, then you probably want to wait until about mid April and then make a second application eight weeks later to give season long control. Barricade and Dimension applied in mid to late March should give you season long control with one application.

The final item to take care of now, is getting your lawn mower ready. I suspect (hope) it will be several weeks before we need the mowers, so let's take the time now to get them ready to go. If you didn't take care of this last fall, tuneup your lawn mower and get the blade sharpened so you're ready for that first mowing of spring!