

What Should You Be Doing Now to Your Lawn

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I routinely tell homeowners that fall (early September through early November) is the most important season for your lawn. The things you do for your lawn this fall will dictate far more about how it will look next spring than just about anything you do in the spring!

If you were wanting to seed a new lawn or overseed an existing lawn, that window is starting to close. Bluegrass seed needs to be in the ground by October 1st, tall fescue needs to be in the ground October 15th. You can plant later but it is risky. Not because the seedlings will freeze out, but they may not become well enough rooted to avoid being heaved out of the soil by freezing and thawing of the soil through the winter. If you want to lay sod, of either species, you can go later into the fall with that, you just may need to water it during warm or dry periods this winter.

The other thing that you should be doing right now is fertilizing your cool season lawns. Notice I said fertilizing, not weed and feed; it's too early for that. Right now, especially with all the rain in recent weeks, and cooler temperatures, the grass is really gearing up to do a lot of growing. Much of that growing will be underground however. For that growth to occur at an optimum level the plants need nitrogen. The wet weather I already mentioned has caused much of the nitrogen in the soil to be lost out of the root zone. So a timely application of a high nitrate fertilizer right now is very advisable. Follow the directions on the lawn fertilizer bag that you have purchased for correct application rates. If you are using an agricultural grade fertilizer, apply one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of yard.

If you have taken a soil test and know that your yard is also low on phosphorus, September is a great time to apply that. Since phosphorus does not move readily into the soil like nitrogen does, it would help to core aerate the lawn first and then spread the phosphorus fertilizer. If you are using a fertilizer with both nitrogen and phosphorus, that's fine, but still core aerate first.

The weed control that we need to do in the fall has little to do with crabgrass and everything to do with all those pretty flowers we don't want in our yards come spring. All of those spring blooming weeds start growing in the fall. Some have already started growing, others are germinating now thanks to this weeks rains, and others will be coming along in the next few weeks. The herbicides we use to control these weeds only works on plants that have germinated and are growing. Apply them too soon (now) and you will have a large crop of weeds germinate afterwards that won't be controlled. I like to wait until the last half of October to treat for broadleaf weeds. The weed and feed type fertilizers will work great at this time, even if you apply fertilizer now! If you have had little barley issues in the past, you need to get your pre-emerge products applied now. Call me for more details on this pest.

The only other thing you need to be doing this fall is continuing to mow your fescue and bluegrass at 3 to 3½ inches tall. Those long leaf blades are needed to shade the soil and produce the food needed by the grass plant to grow thick and green. The surest way to have a serious weed problem is to routinely mow fescue shorter than 3 inches. It'll become clumpy and the areas between the clumps will be filled with weeds!