

## The Spring Lawn Season is Upon Us

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Mid March is typically the time of year when our cool season lawn grasses start growing. It also is the time of year that many homeowners suddenly think about getting their lawns in shape, a process that actually should have begun last fall. But since we can't retroactively do lawn work, we'll just see where you are at this point and go from there!

September and October is really the best time to plant grass seed, fertilize lawns and control spring blooming broadleaf weeds like dandelion and henbit. The time frame on these is plant in early September, fertilize in late September and treat weeds and fertilize again the last half of October.

If you did those things last fall, there isn't much you need to do this spring except spot treat any broadleaf weeds that may have been missed. If you treated for weeds in September, especially early September, you likely will have to treat for broadleaf weeds again as many probably didn't come up until after some mid-October rain.

Fertilizing in the fall encourages our cool season grasses, tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass, to develop bigger root systems, more shoots and bigger plant crowns. It essentially encourages the grass to be thicker and fuller. It will also encourage earlier greenup of the lawn. Fertilizing now will also bring about a nice greenup of the lawn, but spring fertilization also encourages far more grass growth, and subsequent mowing, than fall fertilization does. It also doesn't benefit the root system as much as fall fertilization does.

If you didn't do anything to your lawn last fall then you need to do something this spring. Fertilization definitely needs to be done. If you walk around your yard and are seeing dandelions and other broadleaf weeds then you need to treat for those as well. Keep in mind that these weeds will be harder to kill now and even though you treat them, and the sooner the better, some of them will likely bloom, and if they bloom they will produce seed, even as they are dying. Then you also likely want to apply a crabgrass preventer as well. The newer crabgrass preventers, namely Barricade and Dimension, have much longer effective life and can be applied now. They do need about a half inch of rain or irrigation to become activated and effective. If you are thinking about core aerating or de-thatching, you need to do these before applying the crabgrass preventer. Regardless of what crabgrass preventer you use, it needs to be applied by the time the redbuds are blooming.

There are always some caveats with these things and the big one here has to do with if you need to do some reseeding this spring. If you need to reseed or overseed you need to do that the very end of March or the first week of April. If you are doing any lawn seeding do not use a herbicide, especially a crabgrass preventer as it will prevent your new grass seed from growing along with the crabgrass. Get the new grass seed planted and we can deal with weeds later on.

Finally, a few comments on mowing. Many homeowners want to mow off that dead grass of winter to make it greener. This is certainly understandable but it is important to never mow those cool season grasses shorter than 2½ inches tall. One of the common problems I see are homeowners mowing these grasses too short which leads to clumpy grass growth and declining lawn health. Fescue and bluegrass should be mowed 3 to 3½ inches tall. Mow it short once if you want, but then set the mower back up taller for the rest of the season!