

September Is an Important Month for Lawn Care

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Most home lawns in our area are a mix of tall fescue and/or Kentucky bluegrass with varying amounts of foxtail and crabgrass. We don't usually want the foxtail and crabgrass but they invariably show up by late summer which points out some issues that need to be addressed. The weeds aren't the problem, they are the symptom of the problem. The best weed preventer is a lawn that is nice and thick and mowed no lower than three inches. Many of these weeds need sunlight on bare soil to germinate and grow. So if we leave little bare soil and keep it all covered with shade from grass leaves, we'll have minimal troubles with weeds.

Fall, September and October especially, are crucial times to get our fescue and bluegrass lawns back in shape. These grasses are cool season grasses. They make the majority of their growth in the cooler times of the year, fall and spring. So the next two months are an ideal time to sort of rev up their motors and get them into shape. Additionally, if you want to overseed your lawn to thicken it up or completely reseed, September is the best time to do this. The soils are warm so the grass germinates quickly and there is plenty of time to get some good growth and a good root system developed before winter dormancy.

It is helpful to perform yard tasks in a set order. You may not be doing all the things I'll talk about so pick and choose what you do but do them at the right time. If you are going to dethatch or core aerate then do these first. Dethatching is done far more often than is needed and core aerating, which would be very helpful to most lawns, is rarely done. Few lawns have a thatch problem. Many lawns have compaction that core aerating can help with. If you are thinking about overseeding to thicken up your lawn, core aerating first and then broadcasting seed over the top can be very effective.

Reseeding or overseeding in whatever form you do it should be done early in September. If you aren't core aerating, you probably need a power seeder to do an effective job. Just tossing seed over the top of the yard isn't very successful, unless you core aerate first. You need to get that seed into the soil for it to sprout and get established. An application of starter fertilizer ahead of or at planting is often very helpful also. Proper seeding rates are crucial as well. Tall fescue should be seeded at 6 to 8 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet for a new seeding, 3 to 4 pounds for overseeding. Kentucky Bluegrass should be seeded at 2 to 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet for a new seeding, 1 to 1.5 pounds for an overseeding. Once it's planted it should be watered regularly if it doesn't rain to get it up and growing.

If you aren't overseeding or reseeding then the first thing to be done in September is a fertilizer application. Do NOT use a weed and feed in September, just a fertilizer that is high in nitrogen. If you keep fertilizing and nothing seems to happen you may need to also apply higher rates of phosphorus. The weed and feed products are used to control the weeds that bloom early in the spring. These will start to germinate in September and continue on into early October. These weeds must be up and growing when we use the weed and feed products or they won't work. Applying the weed killers in early September will result in a lot of weeds coming up afterwards that won't be controlled. Use the weed control products in late October or very early November. And above all else, mow no shorter than 3 inches! The healthier you can get your lawn this fall, the better it will look next spring and it will green up earlier too!