

Making your Lawn The Envy of The Neighborhood! Allan Storjohann

I know that death and taxes are supposed to be the two absolutes in life, but I'm going to add a third to the list, and that is yard care! Whether your front yard is a smooth, homogenous, picture-perfect span of emerald green turf or a gold mine for a weed identification class, it still has to be cut now and then.

If you already have the perfect lawn, then continuing with this article may not be necessary. But if more dirt comes out of your mower's side shoot than grass clippings then you might stay with me a while.

I can't really come down hard on folks with bad lawns, they have a tendency to sneak up on us, kind of like the flu. Over the years, weeds, bugs and disease take their toll and before we know it, the lawn has given itself over to the dark side, if you will pardon my analogy.

So, what's a homeowner to do? If questions on my radio program are any indication, the average homeowner is simply unsure how to turn things around. It seems so complicated! Well, I am here to tell you that it isn't that complicated. After all, if I can tell someone the prescription for a healthy lawn in 45 seconds or less on the radio, which I do hundreds of times each year, then it can't be that complicated!

So let's discuss how to make it happen! You can turn that humiliating patch of weeds into a future object of neighbor envy! The first thing you ought to know is that there is no magic involved, no hocus pocus, just a simple schedule for weed control and fertilization and guidelines for mowing heights and frequency. That's it!

Let's start with weed control. The reason for this is simple. Weeds compete with the turf grass for nutrients and water. They are in the business of domination, and they're very good at it.

So, let's prevent them from growing in the first place. First, it pays to cut the dead stems off of your bermuda grass lawn. Some call this de-thatching, I call it scalping. This will greatly benefit the grass and promote growth low to the ground, which will make your lawn look good right off the bat. For fescue, this step is not necessary.



Next, just apply a pre-emergence herbicide on your lawn area by mid-March. This will prevent summer annual weeds from germinating in late March and early April. If you missed the pre-emergence application this spring, you can still get the weeds by spraying a post-emergence crabgrass killer in early summer. If you look around in early spring and there is an abundance of broadleaf weeds like dandelions, henbit, chickweed and clover, then use a post emergence spray labeled for broad leaf weed control. These products are better applied in early spring before too many plants have leaved out. If your bermuda grass is still dormant, products with Glyphosate, such as Round-Up, will kill the green weeds and not harm the turf. Do not use it after bermuda starts to green up and for sure and don't spray Glyphosate on fescue or other cool season grasses!

Always read and follow label directions with all herbicides.

Here in Oklahoma on warm season grasses like bermuda and zoysia, your first fertilizer application should be in mid to late April. I always use one of the nursery recommended turf fertilizers, preferably those with a ratio of 3-1-1 or 3-1-2 for the numbers shown on the front of the bag. I try to keep the first number, which represents the percentage of nitrogen in the bag, somewhere in the lower 20's and the second two numbers 1/3 of that. I particularly like formulations that are in the range of 22-7-7 or 18-6-6 with added iron and sulfur. With a low nitrogen fertilizer, I can fertilize once a month and still only have to mow once a week. The higher the nitrogen or the heavier I apply it will increase my mowing frequency. So, if you don't have much time on your hands, or if money is an issue, then don't fertilize more than three times this summer. Once in early May, once in mid-June and lastly on the first of August. That will keep your bermudagrass lawn green, and give you some time to spend with the wife and kids! A quick tip for fescue, fertilize it in fall and in spring, late September, early November, early March and late April. If the fescue lawn is thinning, reseed it between the middle of Sept. and the middle of October. The bermuda grass lawn establishes best by seed or sod in May and June.



It's a good idea to mow the lawn at 2 inches high for warm season grasses like bermuda and zoysia, and 3 inches for fescue and rye. Try to mow again before the grass has put on more than half its height in new growth. It really helps to have your mower blades sharpened once a season to get a clean cut and avoid damage to the leaf blades. Using a mulching mower will reduce the amount of fertilizer you need to apply and the volume of clippings you will need to bag up! If you do collect your clippings, try to compost them on site to save room at the landfill!

See there! That wasn't so hard!

Good luck with your lawn this season, and may it be the envy of the neighborhood!