



Spring Lawn Tips by Pamm Cooper, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Spring can be a good time to see if the lawn needs any repairs. Road and sidewalk salts can kill some turf grass species like Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass. Perhaps grass thinned out during last summer due to drought or grub problems. Sometimes it is a good idea to topdress small areas with good topsoil after scattering some seed in small open spots and rake in.

Thinned lawns can be over-seeded with a half-rate of quality grass seed. In all situations where seeding is done, make sure to keep the seed moist at all times to ensure most of it will germinate. Fertilizers containing slow-release nitrogen can be applied after seeding. Some products for preemergent crabgrass control, like pendimethalin, cannot be applied when seeding lawns and will be effective for 4-5 months so seeding cannot follow for that time period.

Spring seeding can be tricky because many annual weeds will germinate and compete with new seedlings, including crabgrass. A pre and post emergent acting herbicide containing the active ingredient mesotrione can be applied safely when lawn seeding and will help prevent many weeds, including crabgrass, from getting a foot in the door while grass seedlings get established. Crabgrass seeds germinate after several days of temperatures in the 60s, and cool season grass seeds can germinate best when soil temperatures are over 55 degrees. This leaves a small window in the spring to get desired grass established from seed before crabgrass starts to germinate. Crabgrass seeds can remain viable for years and are unaffected by salt, so a dense stand of desirable turf species should help keep this weed from getting a foothold in the lawn. Any pre-emergent herbicides for crabgrass should be put down just before lilac/flowering dogwood bloom.

Spring is a good time to dethatch lawns or aerify compacted areas. Wait until the grass has started to grow to speed recovery. And wait to fertilize established lawns until the grass is actively growing. If the weather remains below 50° the grass won't be growing anyway, so any fast-release nitrogen applied then is unnecessary, and it may even be leached past the root zone if heavy spring rains occur. This is truly a case where patience is a virtue. Natural or organic fertilizers do not break down well if soils are too cold, so apply these as soils warm up, which looks like they might this week.

If grubs were a problem the year before, and some damage is seen from spring feeding, it is usually too late to apply most grub control products. It is too cold to apply nematodes, and it takes too long for most systemic products to work. Plan to apply the appropriate systemic product in early to mid-May and water it to the root zone. This way it will be translocated to plant roots by the time young larva hatch. Try using a product with the active ingredient chlorantraniliprole for good control of all lawn grub species. It is most effective when applied in mid-May and should be effective through September.

Most biological products used for grub control should be applied when grubs are present and when the grubs are very small. Certain products may only be effective on particular grub species, so identify the species before purchasing products or they may not work. Milky Spore Disease, *Paenibacillus popilliae* is a soil-dwelling bacterium that only works for Japanese beetle grubs. *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *galleriae* will provide 70% control on many grub species if applied before the third instar of the grub. *Heterorhabditis* species of nematodes are adept at locating and infecting white grubs, especially those of the Japanese beetle, but can be ineffective or inconsistent with other grub species.

Last year was a disaster for many lawns as we had had record heat and drought from May through mid-September. Lawns mowed during the summer may have been stressed to the point of dormancy if not watered after being mowed. Lawn areas that received no supplemental irrigation every couple of weeks just to keep grass crowns alive may have eventually died out. Turf-type tall lawn fescues or fine-leaved fescues are more drought tolerant than bluegrass and ryegrass and should at least stay alive, and sometimes stay green, during hot summers.

Spring seeding often fails completely because new grass is very susceptible to heat and dry conditions that may occur that same summer. Their root systems are neither deep enough nor mature enough for young plants to survive during the summer unless irrigated as needed. If rains are not timely, new grass needs water consistently in hot or dry weather. Waiting to seed until mid-August to mid-September would give better results. If seeding needs to be done in spring, count on having to reseed in late summer if new lawns thinned out.

Because lawns were stressed last summer, many weeds got a great start, especially dandelions. Try digging these out, being careful to get the entire taproot. and drop grass seed in the hole. If a large area is infested with broadleaf weeds, then choose the appropriate control product that is safe to use on established lawns. Sprays work better than granular products. Weeds that have runners or rhizomes like ground ivy or clover may need more than one application. Herbicides with triclopyr as one active ingredient work well on troublesome perennial weeds. Keeping turfgrass mowed higher- 3 inches during summer or even all season- plus persistently seeding even small bare areas to keep grass dense goes a long way too prevent weeds from becoming a problem in the first place.

While we can't do anything about the weather, we can implement sound lawn care practices that will help turf gain the advantage when adverse weather conditions or other problems come to pass. And if having a lawn is proving tiresome, take some of it out and put in something else, such as a landscape using native plants.

For questions about lawn care or or any other home and garden topic, call the UConn Home & Garden Education Center, toll-free, at (877) 486-6271 or visit us at www.ladybug.uconn.edu.





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