



## Spring lawn care

### Top Soil is King

New home, new lawn? Congratulations! Your lawn grows best with 4-8 inches of topsoil beneath. Good topsoil is the foundation for a healthy lawn, but many new homes have had their topsoil compacted and removed during construction, leaving behind debris and clay. These lawns soak up little water and require more fertilizer and pesticides. To slowly improve topsoil so your grass grows better, add organic materials like lawn clippings, mulched leaves or a top dressing of compost with aeration.

### Here's How You Mow to Grow

1. **Most lawns need to be cut every four to five days**, not every seven to ten days, like most of us tend towards!
2. **Follow the One-Third Rule:** Never remove more than a third of the blade.
3. **Don't scalp your lawn** if spring rain or vacation leaves you with really tall grass. Instead, gradually reduce cutting height to keep a healthy balance between root and blade growth. If you keep scalping your lawn, you won't have to mow as often because your grass will die!
4. **Keep your grass tall at 2½" to 3½"** to preserve moisture and out-compete weeds.
5. **Sharpen those blades.** Dull blades chew, tear, and rip grass, which stresses the plant. Torn blades die back and are more likely to succumb to disease and pests. And you can save on fuel costs by using efficient, sharp blades. Sharpen at least once a year, and check out reel mowers if you've got small yard.

### Grow Native

Turf doesn't do much for biodiversity. Add natives to your garden beds, vegetable gardens, or landscaping. Research shows that native plants offer more for biodiversity. Why plant pansies when milkweed feeds monarchs, and oaks support over 500 species of butterflies and moths that feed our songbirds?

### Turfgrass and Water Quality

Studies show that runoff from healthy lawns is nearly zero, due to its dense matrix of grass shoots, stems, and leaves. However, patchy lawns will lose soil during rainstorms- this makes water cloudy and suffocates fish.

*Program support comes from the following communities:*





## Summer lawn care

### About Watering

1. **To water or not to water?** It is important to make a decision about whether or not you'll provide regular watering for your lawn to keep its green color, or let it go dormant in the summer. Dormancy is best suited for well-established lawns rather than new or heavily trafficked lawns. Residents in new developments where topsoil has been removed may want to keep their lawns watered.
2. **Dormant grass is not dead.** Turfgrasses are cool-season plants designed for dormancy when water is scarce, though they may look ugly and brown. After 4-6 weeks of no rain, even dormant grass needs to be watered. Watering it seldom and deeply (1-1.5 inches) will keep the roots alive without causing the grass to green up. This encourages deeper roots that are more drought-tolerant.
3. **Don't tease your lawn with an occasional sprinkle.** Sporadic, irregular watering "confuses" your turf resulting in shallow rooting and stress. If you're watering grass to maintain its green color, approximately 1" of water per week is necessary. Measure using a rain gauge (why yes, you're welcome!) or even a tuna can.
4. **How and when you water matters.** Overwatering is more of a problem for homeowners than is under-watering (contact Franklin Soil and Water to see if you qualify for a free irrigation sensor). Too much irrigation deprives plant roots of oxygen, and can contribute to water pollution when fertilizer is washed away before grass is able to use it. Grubs will enjoy laying eggs in your damp lawn too! Watering deeply in the morning when water is needed and less likely to evaporate is ideal.

### Mow High and Let It Lie

Keeping your grass a little taller at about 3" in the summer reduces soil temperatures, preserves moisture, prevents weed germination, and helps maintain turfgrass quality. Grass that's cut too closely is easily stressed, causing it to brown more quickly than longer grass. Dandelions are especially common in lawns that are thin or cut too short. Leaving the grass clippings on your lawn recycles nutrients, and doesn't cause thatch (it's caused by over-fertilization and over-watering that produce excess growth and long clippings.) Grass in our storm drains pollute our water, and provide nutrient-rich "food" for algae- so keep that mower aimed away from the street, and be sure to clean up after yourself!

### Proper Lawn Care Practices Protect Our Streams

Healthy lawns benefit our streams because they absorb more water during rain storms, require less fertilizer, and are less likely to require pesticide and/or herbicide application than unhealthy lawns.

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## Fall Lawn Care

### Leaf it on Your Lawn

Grass clippings and leaves return nutrients and organic matter to your lawn and soil, and prevent soil compaction caused by rain and foot traffic. Too many? Instead of bagging them, use excess leaf material in garden beds or add it to your compost bin for a good carbon (“brown”) source. Dead leaves also provide cover for wildlife during the colder months. According to the National Wildlife Federation, “Removing leaves also eliminates vital wildlife habitat. Critters ranging from turtles and toads to birds, mammals and invertebrates rely on leaf litter for food, shelter and nesting material. Many moth and butterfly caterpillars overwinter in fallen leaves before emerging in spring.”\* Are you eligible for a rebate on your compost bin, native plants, or rain barrel? Check [communitybackyards.org](http://communitybackyards.org).

### Get Your Lawn On

Late summer (between Mid-August and mid-September) is good time for over-seeding thin lawns and filling in bare spots. The soil is still warm for good root development and seeds sprout quickly. Cut the grass as short as possible, and spread seed over a de-thatched or aerated lawn.

### Fall is For Fertilization

University research shows that fall is the best time to fertilize, since shorter days and cooler temperatures encourage root growth. The grass will use what fertilizer is available this fall, while the remaining nutrients are frozen in the soil to be used in the spring when the soil warms. Organic fertilizers are typically slow-release and provide some benefits to the soil, while synthetic products are quickly available to the plant and provide immediate growth and greening.

#### Fertilizers and Water Quality

- ✓ Look for products with a higher percentage of slow-release forms of nitrogen. Quick-release products may not be able to be absorbed by the plants in time, and can move offsite quickly.
- ✓ Don't fertilize the sidewalks, driveways, or roads (they won't grow!) Wind and water can carry it to storm drains that empty directly into your nearest stream.
- ✓ Don't apply to frozen or very dry soils.
- ✓ Use special care around water sources like ponds and streams. A buffer or “no fertilizer” zone of 10-25 feet prevents contamination that can lead to algae growth.

\*Laura Tangley. “Why You Should Leave the Leaves.” National Wildlife Federation. Web. 02 March 2017.

Learn More and Pledge for Clean Water at [getgrassy.org](http://getgrassy.org)

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## Winter Lawn Care

### Just keep mowing

Keep cutting the grass as long as it continues to grow! Some prefer to reduce their mowing height to 2” for the last mow of the season. This is so that grass won’t be matted down by ice and snow that may cause issues the following spring. Do remove large leaves from the grass, preferably by shredding them with a mulching mower. Non-mulching mowers may require a few passes. As long as you can see the grass through the leaf pieces, you’ll both be improving your soil and managing autumn leaves.

### Pick up your toys

Fire pits, tables, chairs and planters can brighten up a lawn in the summertime but once winter rolls around the grass under and around these objects may die off completely rather than go dormant with the rest of your lawn. Come spring you may be left with gaps or sparse grass in and around areas where objects have been sitting. Also keep an eye out for fallen tree limbs in the winter time, especially after ice and snow storms. You’ll want to remove them quickly to keep them from killing off surrounding grass.

### Destroy ice, not your grass

Eco-friendly ice melters aren’t just good for the health of your lawn, they also tend to be less harmful to waterways when they run off, less damaging to vehicles than harsher products, and safer for pets and children. If there is still melting product leftover after the ice has melted, consider sweeping it up and disposing of it properly or re-using it.

### Be picky about plant trimming

Winter is one of the best times to cut back trees and large woody shrubs. However, consider holstering your pruners when it comes to tall grasses and perennial wildflowers in your garden. Both provide seeds for birds to eat during the chilly winter months as well as shelter for overwintering pollinators and other wildlife. You can cut back dead grasses and flowers in the spring when the weather starts to warm up.

### Winterize your mower



- Run the engine until all fuel is gone
- While engine is warm, drain oil and replace with fresh oil
- Lubricate appropriate parts
- Remove battery and charge it before storage (if applicable)

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