

Turfgrass Fertilization Time!

Spring is when we focus most of our efforts on turfgrass management. Let's face it. By the time you've mowed all summer long – in addition to the other lawn care chores you have to take care of! – adding one more turf care chore in the fall is the last thing on your list! With that in mind, try not to look at fall fertilization so much as a chore as a 'time savings tool' for next spring! Let me explain...

Fertilizer applications to turfgrass in the spring can do a lot of good. They make the lawn grow quickly. They provide a turf with a dark green color. They may even cause it to grow fast enough that you can't see the weeds! Unfortunately, the benefit of the fertilizer application might actually be increased by application in the fall versus the spring! If you could only fertilize your cool-season grasses (tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass) once per year, September would be that time!

As days shorten and temperatures, particularly at night, start to moderate, grasses enter their fall growth cycle. This is the time when these cool-season grasses naturally thicken up via tillering (forming new shoots at the base of existing plants) and, for bluegrass, spreading by underground stems called rhizomes. September fertilizer applications can really help this thickening up process.

For best results, apply one to one and a half pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet (the settings recommended on lawn fertilizer bags usually result in about one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet). Fertilizer products do differ slightly, and while most fall fertilizers on the shelf right now are quick release (or a combination quick/slow release), be sure to check for certain.

Time savings wise, a good fall application could help thicken a stand to the point that the turf is a better competitor with weeds than it would be with a single spring application – without the excessive growth that often occurs in the spring. With any luck, that can reduce (not eliminate!!) weed pressure issues and mowing in the spring. See! Time saved!!

If there was a second most important fertilization time frame for cool-season grasses, it would actually be November! November applications will help the grass green up earlier next spring and provide the nutrients needed until summer. It also should be quick-release applied at the rate of one pound actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.