

LANDSCAPE SPRING CLEANING

It is spring and time to shed the winter blues with gardening and lawn improvements chores in April. To assist you, we have suggested this quick checklist of chores.

1. Clean up debris. This includes limbs, leaves, trash and anything else that accumulated over the winter months.
2. Remove any burlap and prune away winter-killed branches to make room for new growth. Cut back overgrown bushes and shrubs with pruning shears or loppers. Try to allow for adequate sunlight and air flow while still maintaining the natural shape and integrity of the tree/shrub. Check your woody landscape plants for injury — particularly the evergreens. For deciduous plants, wait until the buds have opened before removing any dead branches, unless they are broken. Spring is also a great time to shape and control plants that have become overgrown or are invasive.
Note: Do not prune all your plants in spring! Trees and shrubs that flower in summer should be pruned in early spring. Those that bloom in spring, such as azaleas and lilacs, should be pruned in late spring after they flower.
Note: Do not uncover your roses until the danger of a heavy frost is over! When you do uncover them, clean away any soil or other organic material that was used to seal them in for the winter. While the plants are still dormant, you can improve their health and vigor with some selective pruning. Remove any dead, blackened, or damaged wood. Prune the cane down to healthy wood, just before a leaf bud.
3. Cut back spent perennials and pull up old annuals.
4. Dethatch or raked lawn. Raking will stimulate growth or “wake up” the lawn. Matted and other damaged or bare areas in the lawn should be vigorously raked, topdressed and/or reseed with the correct Endophytic grass seed. NOTE: If the soil is too cool at seeding depth (2" below ground), germination will be delayed until the soil temperature reaches about 15° C (about 60° F). Spring seeding should not begin until soil temperature reaches or exceeds the required minimum which is at 10°C (55°F)
5. Cultivate and/or Re-mulching and re-edge all existing beds. Amending the beds with peat moss, compost, manure, or fertilizers is a plus at this time of year, in preparation for planting and addressing the needs of existing trees and shrubs.
6. Cut grass if needed. If you have had a lot of water mixed with warm temperatures, spring may require that you cut your grass. Doing so will not only improve the appearance of your lawn but also stimulate the grass to grow.

Next Steps...

Retailers usually tell us it is time to start working on our landscape with the stack of fertilizers and landscape products displays in front of their stores and garden centers. BUT IS IT TIME?

Because of these promptings by retailers, many people assume April is the best time to fertilize and overseed lawns. However, hold it! There is one important criterion that MUST be met before deciding to fertilize or overseed – the correct soil temperature!

SPRING FERTILIZING

Turf Grass

Actually, the best time to apply fertilizer in spring to turfgrass is when the soil temperature has warmed and the grass plant is actively growing. Fertilizing too early or before soil temperature reaches the ideal range, may be detrimental to the long-term health of the lawn. Sure you'll get expedited top growth and a beautiful lush appearance, but at what cost?

Spring fertilization can discourage grass from storing food reserves for the stressful summer season ahead, because the turf may grow too fast before roots can grow to support the lawn during adverse conditions. This makes a lawn less tolerant to summer heat stresses, and the lush succulent growth encouraged by early spring fertilization can make the plant more susceptible to insects and diseases.

We do not want to promote "top-growth" (leaves) at the expenses of root growth! Ideally, fertilizer application should be done when the roots break dormancy and begin growing, The roots of cool-season grasses grow bet between 12° - 18°C (54° - 65°F).

For crabgrass control, application of any product with a light fertilizer content after the forsythia has bloomed but before the dandelions go to the "puff ball" stage is encouraged.

If crabgrass is a persistent problem, avoid fertilizing in late spring and summer. Especially avoid applications of high Phosphorus fertilizers. Phosphorus is essential for seedling growth and will only promote crabgrass establishment. Crabgrass seeds start to germinate when the soil temperature reaches 10° - 14°C (50° - 58°F), therefore apply Corn Gluten Meal in early spring (carefully monitoring soil temperatures), and again in late summer/early fall on established lawns only and water the lawn thoroughly. **DO NOT OVERSEED LAWN UNTIL 6 WEEKS AFTER!**

Trees & Shrubs

Fertilizer applied in late fall is more effective in promoting plant growth than spring applied fertilizer. However, spring fertilizer application should be made before new growth starts. *(Fertilization in late summer (mid August) should be avoided since it may stimulate late growth that will not harden off before frost, unless recommended in specific situations)*

SEEDING

If the soil is too cool, germination is delayed, which results in seed damage and uneven or inadequate seeding emergence. Spring seeding should not begin until soil temperature at seeding depth reaches or exceeds the required minimum which is at 12°C (55°F). If you have to spread or slit seed in early spring, germination will be compromised until the soil temperature reaches about 15°C (59°F). It is important to note that soil temperatures at 2" below ground must have reached 58-65°F or 15-18°C to achieve proper germination.

AERATION

Aerating your lawn produces tremendous benefits as discussed earlier! However, aeration can be done in the spring along with fall. In the spring however, aeration should be done when the roots are actively growing and soil is dried sufficiently. Ideally aerate when soil temperatures are between 10 - 18°C (50-65°F) range