

October 10, 2016

### **'Grass Roots' Turf Tips: Get a Head Start on Spring by Overseeding and Fertilizing Now**

A familiar refrain among visitors to 'Grass Roots' this fall has been "this has been a hard summer" and "what do I do about all the crabgrass in my lawn?" Of course with cooler and shorter days, crabgrass and other summer annual weeds are starting to fade away, leaving brown patches in their wake. We continue to remind people that the best defense against crabgrass and other weeds is a thicker lawn that provides less space for weeds to get a foothold and the best way to do this is to fertilize moderately and overseed during the fall months.

#### Overseeding

Fall is the best time of year for overseeding since it is a perfect time for cool-season grasses given the cool nights and mild days. Even if you didn't aerify this fall (it's still not too late for the mid-Atlantic, mid-South, and lower Midwest), it's always helpful to put some seed down in thin or bare areas. You can do this by lightly "roughing up" your lawn with a thatcher or power rake and then seeding or using a "power seeder" that does both of these steps at the same time. If you just have a few areas that need rejuvenation, you can use a hand rake to rough up smaller areas by hand. Use compost or some other seed mulch covering to help keep the seeds protected and keep the seeds moist until they germinate and begin to get established.



*At the 'Grass Roots' exhibit we overseed our "high traffic" and "high stress" areas, like this area near a sidewalk, every fall season.*

## Fertilizing

October is also a great month to fertilize cool-season grasses to prepare for winter and next spring. The standard recommendation is to apply 1 lb. of actual nitrogen per 1000 sq. ft. of lawn. The first number on the bag gives the percentage nitrogen contained in the product; the second number notes the percentage of phosphorus; and the third number is the percentage of potassium. For example a "20-0-18" would have 20% nitrogen, 0% phosphorus, and 18% potassium. Five lbs. of product would be needed for 1 lb. of actual nitrogen since  $5 \text{ lbs.} \times 20\% = 1 \text{ lb.}$  So, in this example, you would aim for applying 5 lbs. of product per 1000 sq. ft. of area. For fall and "winterizer" fertilizers, look for the first number on the bag ("nitrogen") and the third number ("potassium") to be about the same; usually the second number ("phosphorous") is much lower or zero. Try to find fertilizers with a mix of "slow-release", listed on the back of the bag as "water insoluble nitrogen" and "quick-release", listed on the back of the bag as either "water soluble", "ammoniacal nitrogen" or "nitrate nitrogen".

For warm-season grasses like bermudagrass, St. Augustinegrass, and zoysia, the standard recommendation is to fertilize no later than six weeks before your area's predicted first frost date. With that said, mid-October is most likely too late, except for the Gulf Coast region, Florida, and the Southwest.

For more specific information on lawn care practices for your state, you can check out our list of [university extension turfgrass websites](#).