

'Grass Roots' Turf Tips- Late Fall Lawn Care

Late-Fall Fertilization

In all but the most northern tier and high mountain regions there is still time to fertilize your cool-season lawn before it goes dormant for the winter. These "cool-season" lawn grasses include tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, fine fescue, and perennial ryegrass. If you have a warm-season lawn like zoysia, Bermuda, centipede, St. Augustine, or buffalograss, it's too late to fertilize (except for central/south Florida) since those grasses are best fertilized in summer. Using a "fall fertilizer" that contains approximately the same percentage of potassium, "K" (the 3rd number on the label) as nitrogen, "N" (the 1st number on the label) will help supply the adequate potassium needed to help with winter stress tolerance. Usually, fall fertilizer is applied at 1 lb. of actual nitrogen/1000 sq. ft. of lawn (be sure to adhere to your state's fertilizer guidelines since some states limit fertilizer applications to slightly lower than this rate). Always read the fertilizer label, be sure your fertilizer spreader is calibrated, and sweep any fertilizer off hard surfaces.

'Grass Roots' uses professional slow- and controlled-release fertilizer products courtesy of sponsor Koch Agronomic Services.

Fertilizing - With Leaves???

Mulch mowing leaves is an effective way to reduce the time it takes for "leaf clean up" and a great way to recycle your yard's nutrients and reduce the amount of material going into your community's "green waste" or refuse collection.

[Research studies by Michigan State University](#) have indicated that under optimal conditions you can mulch mow up to 6" of leaves at a time with a mulching mower, but mowing only 3"-4" at a time provides a better chance to chop leaves up more efficiently. The chopped up leaf litter then falls back into the turfgrass canopy and decomposes, returning nutrients to the soil. Research has indicated that mulch mowing leaves can also contribute to a reduction in broadleaf weeds over 3+ years.

In summary, there are a number of factors attributed to effectively mulch mowing your leaves, including the number of deciduous trees you have, your lot size, if you have any windstorms, and, of course, your time. So, when you think about leaf clean up this autumn, save time and recycle your yard's nutrients and "leave it alone" until its time to mow.

Sidewalks, Driveways, and Patios

Even with mulch mowing, there is usually some more leaf management to do on sidewalks, driveways, and patios. While there is always the handheld leaf rake, recent technology advancements have improved the efficiency of leaf blowers. Today, there are several battery-powered models available that offer more power and longer duration, while eliminating exhaust emissions. On hard surfaces, wet leaves can pose a slipping hazard and some temporary concrete staining if left too long (Hint: you can blow them off onto your lawn and then mulch mow!)

'Grass Roots' uses battery-powered string trimmers and blowers provided by sponsor STIHL, Inc.

Soil Testing

One very important, but sometimes overlooked aspect of managing lawn and garden nutrition is soil testing. Soil tests are a reasonably priced, easy way to gain insight into the status of your soil. Properly managing your soil nutrient status is critical to growing healthy plants, which are more able to withstand drought, pests, and other stresses. Submit separate soil tests for areas of your yard that are dramatically different in soil type, slope, or use. For instance, take separate soil samples for your lawn, vegetable garden and landscape garden beds.

You can find out more about soil testing and locate labs in your area by contacting your state extension service or through information on your state's university turfgrass [website](#).



Mulch mowing leaves is a great way to save time and return nutrients to your lawn!



Removing leaves from walks, patios, and driveways keeps these areas clear and reduces slip hazards from wet leaves.