

As the heat of summer gives way to the cooler, crisper days of fall, it is time to switch your gardening focus from watering and dead-heading to preparing your yard for fall and winter. Whether you are reseeding, fertilizing or redoing your lawn, fall is the best time of the year. Your lawn will respond better to all your efforts, especially in the months of September and early October.

## Time to Seed

Why is fall the best time to seed? In the fall, soil temperatures are warmer. They've had all summer to heat up. This along with our frequent rains helps the seeds germinate quickly. The faster the seed germinates and the lawn becomes more established, the less competition it has with weeds. The cool air temperatures also allow the young lawn to grow strong without the threat of heat stress.

## Don't Forget to Fertilize

You will want to fertilize your lawn twice this season, once in early September and once in mid-November. When you feed your lawn in the fall with a Fall and Winter Fertilizer, the nutrients are changed into carbohydrates which improve the root system in your lawn. By putting energy into the roots instead of promoting blade growth you are improving your lawn for next spring and summer. The expanded root system also allows the grass plants to send out new rhizomes and encourages deeper roots. Fall and Winter Fertilizers are formulated to feed your lawn without causing a lot of blade growth, so your lawn is completely focused on root growth and you don't have to worry about mowing your lush lawn until next spring.

## Air it out

Aeration is one simple thing that you can do for your lawn each year to help it grow healthy and lush. This of course comes after mowing, watering and fertilizing. Aeration has several benefits for your lawn. First, it takes compaction out of the soil. This allows for better water percolation and allows fertilizer to reach the root zone. The plugs that are left on the surface due to aeration also have a purpose: They allow microbes to decompose thatch. Thatch is the major cause of many ailments in your lawn. The soil from the plugs will dissolve into your turf and the microbes from the soil will start decomposing the thatch. To make your aerating easier, water your lawn a day or two before having it aerated. This will help you draw longer plugs. The deeper the aeration plug, the better.

## Get it Under Control

Fall is a great time to control broadleaf weeds in your lawn. Broadleaf weeds like clover and dandelions are preparing themselves for winter in the fall months. They are in the same mode as your lawn, storing carbohydrates in their root system instead of growing above ground. If you don't take care of them in the fall, come spring your weeds are going to be stronger than ever. There are many options for lawn weed killer. Weed killers work by causing the plant to grow beyond its ability to sustain that growth. For best results, try to spray for weeds when temperatures are in the mid-50's or warmer. A couple of good suggestions for weed killers are Bayer Advanced All-In-One Weed Killer for Lawns or Ferti-lome's Weed Free Zone.

## Mow it Down

As the weather cools down in the fall, lower the height of your mower. Mowing the lawn shorter in the fall encourages rhizome development in the turf which will thicken the lawn and help choke out weeds. Begin in September and continue through October, gradually reducing the height of your lawn until you're mowing to a height of approximately one inch. By slowly reducing the height, your lawn will not be stressed by the shorter mower height as the fall temperatures cool.

## Over Seed it

If you have areas in your lawn that have thinned out over the summer, fall is the perfect time to take care of those less than stellar areas. Many things can cause your lawn to thin out, the most common being weed invasions and areas that don't get enough sunlight. These areas can be fixed with over seeding. Over seeding is as simple as it sounds – spreading seed over your existing lawn. If weeds have caused your thin areas, make sure you kill and remove the weeds before over seeding. When over seeding, lightly sprinkle some fresh grass seed over the area and cover it with a thin layer of compost or peat moss. Be sure to use the appropriate seed for the sun exposure of the area you are repairing. Grass seed comes in sun, sun/shade, and shade mixes. If you are unsure about your sun exposure or have areas with different amounts of sun, use the sun/shade mix. It contains a mix of seed that will grow in both conditions. To keep your lawn looking uniform, it is a good idea to lightly over seed your whole lawn with whatever mix you choose. Over seeding should be done at a rate of 3.5 – 5 pounds of seed per 100 square feet. Don't let your lawn get left behind this fall. Take the necessary steps now and you will be rewarded with a beautiful, green, weed-free lawn next spring!