Get your lawn ready for winter

Fall is almost here and winter is around the corner. Is your lawn ready for snow?

By preparing your lawn this fall, you can reduce the chance of having winter lawn damage while also getting a head start on a great looking lawn for next spring.

Aerating, overseeding, mowing and, in some cases, fertilizing are chemical-free healthy lawn practices used to maintain a lush looking yard.

Aerating

Aerating in the fall improves the health and stress tolerance of your lawn, while setting the stage for a higher quality lawn next summer.

Aeration is the process of making finger-sized holes in your lawn to allow nutrients, air and water to reach the soil. Aerating machines can be rented from a nursery or tool rental store.

For small areas, you can go over your lawn with a garden fork or a special hand fork sold for this purpose. Special spiked, walk-over sandals can also be bought for do-it-yourself aeration.

By aerating your lawn in the fall, water will be better able to penetrate the soil and not run off as easily in the spring. Soil compaction and thatch will be reduced, and plant root growth will be stimulated so the plant can reach and store more nutrients and water.

Overseeding

Overseeding should occur while the soil is still warm, until about mid-September, to speed up germination and root development.

Overseed bare patches and aeration holes in your lawn. Regular overseeding leads to a thick lawn that is able to choke out weeds and gives you the opportunity to incorporate a variety of grass species into your lawn.

To overseed, loosen the soil in the bare spots and spread on some topsoil or compost. Next, sprinkle on the grass seeds and walk over them to push the seeds into the soil. Finally, water the area daily, if necessary, until the seeds are established.

Mowing

During summer, the ideal mowing height for your lawn is usually 3 inches. By the time fall arrives, this height should increase to 3 ½ inches in order to help stimulate stunted roots to grow.

For the final mowing of the year, lower your mowing height to 2 ½ inches in height. This will help your lawn prepare for winter and avoid damage from disease.
A mulching mower for leaves and grass clippings returns many nutrients to your lawn.

**Fertilizing**

Leave the grass clippings on your lawn for the whole season and you probably won’t need to add extra fertilizer to your grass. However, if you do fertilize, then fall is the best time to do it.

Fertilizing you lawn in the fall helps to stimulate root growth during the winter and provides disease protection, especially against snow mold. A late fall fertilizing can also eliminate the need to fertilize the following spring.

Never apply fertilizer to frozen soil. It will runoff and pollute nearby waterbodies. Choose a fertilizer that contains water insoluble nitrogen and is high in potassium to promote winter hardiness.

Organic fertilizers, such as dehydrated manure, seaweed, and blood or bone meal are good choices. As with all fertilizers, never apply more fertilizer than is recommended on the label. Fertilizer over-application can harm the environment as well as your health.

With the bugs almost gone and the air pleasantly cool, what better time to get outdoors and prepare for the cold months ahead. You’ll thank yourself next spring for the head start on a great looking lawn.