

Tackle Your Lawn Care Needs This Fall

Winter is just around the corner, which means that the colors of fall will soon fade. Before the leaves disappear to make way for snow and ice, take the time now to prepare your lawn for the long winter months ahead. By tackling a few lawn care chores now, you will spare yourself some extra work next spring.

Here are some tips to help get you started — choose the ones that are right for your lawn:

Test your soil. A test will help you determine the soil's pH level, which affects the rate at which your grass will grow. Soil with a low pH level is highly acidic, which will cause grass to have a difficult time soaking up nutrients.

Re-seed. Fall is the best time of year for re-seeding your lawn to fill in those bare patches and make it full and lush by the following spring. First, loosen the surface soil with a rake or shovel. Then spread the grass seed over the area evenly and gently. Lightly rake to make sure the seed comes in contact with the soil. Apply a light layer of mulch. Re-seed the entire yard if you have a number of large bare spots.

Aerate. Try aerating your lawn before you re-seed it. This process loosens your lawn's soil so air, water and nutrients can better reach the grass roots. Lawn grasses root better in aerated soil and increased oxygen levels help the grass grow. After aerating, spread compost and lime over your lawn to protect the topsoil and add to its nutrient content.

Fertilize. To help promote root growth, you should fertilize your lawn in early November. Manure and other organic matter needs time to break down. When you fertilize your lawn in the fall, you give the fertilizers plenty of time to settle into the soil before next spring, when your grass will need access to plenty of nutrients. Use a specially formulated winterizing fertilizer that is high in potassium, which gives grass the strength it needs to survive winter's storms. Be sure not to over-fertilize, which can kill the grass.

Ward off weeds. Apply a pre-emergence weed killer to control weeds that can crop up during the winter months. To save time, apply a combination fertilizer and weed killer.

It may take some work, but if you follow these steps this fall, you will breathe a sigh of relief next spring when your lawn peeps its glorious self through the last patches of sullen snow.

For more home maintenance tips and tricks, www.nahb.org/forconsumers.