

EARLY SPRING LAWN & GARDEN PREPARATION

Preparing your turf in early spring is the best way to ensure a healthy green yard throughout the year. The same is true for the rest of your garden, including tree and shrub pruning and pest management. Here are some excellent tips from the experts at Utah State University Extension to get you started as we head into spring. Visit their Web site, <http://extension.usu.edu/> for more information and as a resource for many gardening questions.

Preparing Your Lawn

Aeration

Core aeration, where small plugs are removed from the soil, has proven to be more beneficial to turf than power raking, which was a common yard care technique several years ago. Aerating allows better air, water and fertilizer penetration into the soil. It also helps reduce the thatch layer and minimizes compaction that produces unhealthy roots. It can be done any time the ground is free from snow. Heavily used areas and clay soils may need to be aerated twice a year, once in the spring and again in the fall. Normal soil types and use areas are usually fine with one aeration in the spring, and sandy soils only need it every two years.

Fertilization

If a fall fertilizer was applied last year, the grass may not need it again until mid or late May. If there was no fall application, a fertilizer high in nitrogen can be applied now. Consider using a slow release fertilizer, such as sulfur-coated urea. These fertilizers are more expensive, but only need to be applied every two to three months to keep the lawn looking green and lush.

Mowing

You can begin mowing your grass as soon as it starts to grow, leaving it between 2½ to 3 inches tall. You should begin water-



ing when the lawn looks dry or begins to show early symptoms of water stress.

Pre-emergent Weed Control

Weeds, such as spurge, crabgrass and foxtail, are common in July and August and should be controlled in the spring since they are nearly impossible to remove midsummer. Weeds germinate and are small in the spring so they go unnoticed. Nip them in the bud by applying a pre-emergent herbicide to the lawn now and then again in early June. These products must be applied before the weeds begin to germinate since they kill the young germinating annuals, not the established weeds.

Preparing Your Garden

Reducing Pests

Cleaning up debris around the yard and garden will help keep pests under control. They love to hide under old dead plant



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How to: Maintaining a Weed-free Lawn

Maintaining a healthy lawn by proper fertilization, watering and mowing is your first line of defense in controlling weeds. However, if your lawn has become thin through neglect or weather-related reasons, you might need another level of weed control. Early spring is the time to put out pre-emergent chemicals to control weeds and grasses. Pre-emergent herbicides control weeds by forming a barrier that prevents the seed from germinating.

Winter weeds such as henbit, chickweed and annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*) are common nuisances in lawns during spring. These weeds, along with many others, come from seeds that germinate in fall, grow slowly during winter and appear in early spring. They are unsightly in lawns and interfere with the growth and spread of grass. They die out when hot weather arrives leaving brown spots in the lawn. Pre-emergent herbicides are an effective way to control annual weeds. The herbicide kills seeds as they germinate so that weeds never emerge from the soil. However, pre-emergent herbicides are not effective against weeds that are already growing so they must be applied now to be present in the soil when germination occurs.

Pre-emergent herbicides for home lawns are most readily available in granular form and can be applied with a fertilizer spreader—check the bag for proper spreader settings. For uniform distribution apply the granules at half the recommended application rate while walking north and south across your lawn, and the other half walking east and west. After applying, thoroughly water the herbicide into the lawn. The herbicides are formulated to remain in the top portion of the soil, even after a heavy rain. Before applying pre-emergent herbicides be sure to read and follow the product directions carefully.

Of course, one of the most effective ways to reduce weeds in your lawn is to encourage a healthy, “tightly growing” lawn by following a regular fertilizer schedule and overseeding as often as needed. Once you get on an effective regime and achieve a healthy lawn, it’s much easier to keep it going year after year.

material and organic matter. Controlling the first generation of most insects greatly reduces their number throughout the summer. A clean garden eliminates a breeding area or a place for insects to gather.

Controlling Weeds

Control broadleaf weeds in early May with a broadleaf weed killer. These weeds include dandelions, clover, black medic and chickweed. They need to be treated before the weather warms to above 85 degrees.

Trimming Trees

When trimming ornamental and shade trees, remember that the tree limbs and branches will stay at the same height for the entire life of the tree. The growing point for the tree is located in the top terminal bud, and the rest of the tree will only grow in circumference. If the branch is four feet off the ground today, it will be four feet off the ground in 20 years.

Pruning Trees

You can safely prune most trees through the end of May. Most pruning is done before the tree leafs out because it is easier to see where to prune and easier to get into the tree. I recommend pruning in March and early April.

Do very little pruning on ornamental trees. Prune wood that is dead, diseased or injured and branches that cross (rub), grow back into the center of the tree or are out of place. Be sure to keep the natural shape of the tree intact. ✂

*By Bill Calkins with help from the experts at Utah State University Extension.
Visit them on the Web at <http://extension.usu.edu/>*