

I would be remiss if I didn't talk about lawns at this time of year. This week we'll begin covering existing lawns and finish up next week with existing and new lawns.

Overview – Lawns require sun, regular water, healthy thatch growth and removal, aeration, reseeding and mowing. These processes must be repeated regularly year after year to maintain a healthy lawn. Growing and maintaining a lawn in our Maritime Northwest is much different than growing a lawn anywhere else in the country. When researching lawn care make sure the information pertains to our area.

Your own lawns were either started with grass seed, sod or hydro-seeding. All methods work equally well. The seed used should have been mostly rye and fescue. Unfortunately bluegrass and bentgrass is often thrown into the mix. These grasses were developed for sunny, high traffic areas such as ball fields and golf courses, but do not work well at all in most home lawns. Always avoid creeping bentgrasses. In Western Washington it's better to use turf-type perennial ryegrass. When lawns need reseeding (in spring and fall) try to use fescue or rye. If you cannot find a mixture without bentgrass, make sure it is only colonial-type. Nearly all grass seed packages list the names and percentages of grass seed used in the mix. Read package labels and choose mixes made mostly of fescue and rye. One caution – make sure the rye seed you buy is for home lawns, not for pastures.

Shady Areas – If you just can't live without grass in shade, try to find a mix that has mostly fine-leaved fescues (such as creeping red, chewings or hard fescue). If your shady area is mostly made up of moss, why not let the moss take over or remove the moss and plant shade tolerant ground covers such as pachysandra (deciduous) or vinca (evergreen). Call Kitsap County Cooperative Extension at 360-337-7157 and ask for Fact Sheet #77 "Ground Covers," for information on plants or grasses that do well in shady, steep or wet sites.

Fertilizing – Repeat after me, "I will never again use weed and feed on my lawn." The "weed eradicator" portion of the weed and feed is not a good thing. It does not discriminate between a weed and other plants when it kills vegetation. Runoff into waterways and other areas of your garden is often a toxic problem. You'll have healthier lawns by mowing regularly using a mulching mower. Mowing your lawn at a height of two inches shades out weeds and leaving the clippings returns valuable nitrogen as fertilizer. Overseed thin areas of your lawn in spring and fall to crowd out weeds. Removing dandelions by hand and regular mowing eventually makes them die out. You could use weed and feed for the rest of your lawn's life and never ever eradicate the weeds.

Weeds – If weeds have overrun your lawn, though, you can spot treat them with an earth friendly herbicide. Always read every letter of the label before purchasing products. Try to find an organic product. Ciscoe Morris, Ann Lovejoy and other organic gardeners resort to boiling hot water or vinegar poured directly on the offending weeds. And, if you're like me, where I love an excuse for a new toy, find one of those long-handled pincer-type weeding tools to pop weeds out without stooping over.

Mowing – Try to never remove more than one third of your lawn's growth at a time. If your grass is really long, remove growth over several mowings. It's best to mow in a checkerboard pattern (i.e. lines running parallel north to south and then again running parallel east to west). Make sure that your mower blades are always sharpened. Dull blades can damage lawns and invite disease problems.

Watering – Most lawns require one inch of water per week for healthy growth. If this does turn out to be a drought year with water rationing, many lawns can go dormant (turn straw color) and will come back when the monsoons return again.

Lawn care Website and Kitsap County Resources – Visit [www.ci.seattle.wa.us/util/rescons](http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/util/rescons) and click on "Natural Lawn Care" for complete step by step information about how you can have a healthy earth and people friendly

lawn. It's definitely worth a visit. It would take numerous columns to provide the information found at this site. Kitsap County Public Works can answer your questions at 360-337-5777 or 800-825-4940. Ask them to send "Natural Lawn Care for Western Washington" and "Four Reasons to Kick the Weed and Feed Habit."

Next week we'll talk about thatch removal and aerating existing lawns and touch on installing new lawns.

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