

It's nearly mid March and many minds are turning to thoughts of lawns. I once knew a Master Gardener whose standard reply to lawn questions was, "Don't plant them." If you really love lawns though I have some great information to pass along courtesy of Nick Penovich.

Nick specializes in healthy, organic lawn maintenance practices. He brought his experience from a successful business in Seattle called All Around Gardening (sold but still running and going strong) to our side of the pond to establish The Lawn Jockey. In addition to being an excellent lawn renovation and maintenance resource Nick's dabbled with landscape design and installation. In the late 80s he created the landscaping for "Country Living's" house of the year in King County.

Penovich's current passion is lawns. "If I do what I do now correctly, I won't have time to do anything else," he says. You can reach Nick at 360-876-3734. But you'll also want to visit the website his wife Linda maintains at <http://lawnjockey.net>. The site abounds with excellent lawn care advice, information and links to other Northwest gardening sites. There's one caveat. "We don't mow lawns but we encourage you to mulch when you do," the site says.

Nick's already had many calls this month about aerating lawns. He says "it's a little early – wait until at least the third week of March when temperatures start creeping towards 60 degrees and leaves pop out on trees and other things start greening up."

Thatching and top-dressing with Tagro are great lawn enhancers. The trick is "all about balance – find a good balance," says Nick. Aeration with top dressing and sometimes overseeding will often bring a lawn back to health. Nick also believes in using organic slow-release fertilizer.

The trick to thatching according to Nick is to find equipment that will give you twenty holes per square inch minimum. Many rental thatching machines have only nine holes per square inch. "Make several passes in several directions. Do a minimum of two passes to do the job correctly," he says.

Nick always cleans his thatching machinery with a bleach solution after each lawn. Neighbors chipping in to rent a thatcher for the weekend should make sure they sanitize the thatcher before beginning the first lawn and moving on to the next lawn. "If you don't clean it with a bleach solution, you run the risk of transferring diseases to each lawn on down the line," he says.

"I also see nothing wrong with letting lawns dry out the end of the summer," says Nick. His theory is dry soils under lawns keep the crane fly larvae from germinating. The larvae die in a few days from lack of moisture. September is the best time to let your lawns go brown and dormant for a while. "Remember that grass is a perennial," says Nick, "It's a good thing to let it go dormant."

Nick has a solution to moss problems too. He says (and I totally agree) that no matter what you do moss will always be with you. Mossy lawns are cushy and green. "You can't go play football on it, but it's a luxurious area. Just enjoy it. Plant rhodies, ferns and incorporate some decorative features (stone sculpture, shiney ceramic balls) and give your lawn a true northwest look," he said.

The last tips for today from The Lawn Jockey are sodding and reseeding. Most sod comes with an impermeable clay layer. You're better off to hydroseed than to lay down sod. Nick sees too many problem lawns that were sodded. With established lawns reseed to crowd out weeds. The better your lawn grows the less weeds you'll have. Thanks for all the tips, Nick, we're glad you moved over to our side of the water.