

Dirt Works

1195 Dog Team Rd.
New Haven, Vt. 05472

<http://www.dirtworks.net>
Ph: 1-802-385-1064

<http://www.newenglandnatural.com>
Toll Free 1-877-213-3828

Fall Lawn and Landscape Care

Mowing Your Lawn

It's important to keep your grass 2 to 2-1/2 inches tall throughout the fall. If your grass gets much longer (more than 3 inches) it will mat, leading to winter lawn disease problems such as snow mold (That white stuff you see on the grass after the snow melts). If you cut it shorter than 2 inches, you will severely limit its ability to make and store food for growth in the spring. Keep your blades sharp too. Mowing with dull blades can shred the ends of the grass blades leaving them open to dehydration and entry of disease and give them a brown or white appearance. Honing them a little bit before each mowing will help keep them in shape without having to resort to grinding. If you hit rocks or debris and take chunks out of the blades, replacement or heavy grinding may be required.

Raking Leaves

Lawn raking in the fall removes excess organic debris, and can help maintain water quality. In winter, freezing and thawing can cause leaves, dead grass, plants, and other organic debris to release soluble forms of phosphate (and nitrates). If these chemicals run off frozen ground during spring snow melt and early spring rains, they can end up in surface water causing algae blooms and pollution that could eventually make it into the water table. Keep grass clippings, leaf litter, and other organic debris off driveways, sidewalks and streets. Raking can be tedious and painful work. Hire someone to do it or do it a little at a time, so you don't get bored, tired or injured. Some rental companies have leaf vacuums and many of the newer mowers mulch the leaves into the lawn. Mulching mowers work good but, you don't want to do huge piles of leaves with them.

Recycling Leaves

You have several options when it comes to disposing of fallen leaves. The preferred way is to compost them, because composting keeps leaves out of streets and storm sewers. You can also use fallen leaves, whole or chipped by a power mower, as winter mulch around rose bushes and landscape plants. Leave fallen leaves on your lawn and make several passes over them with a power mower, chopping them into a thin layer fine enough to stay on the lawn without causing damage while providing nutrients for the grass. You can also bag leaves

for disposal by municipal authorities. Many progressive towns now require compostable plastic bags for curb side pickup of yard debris. Fortunately, we sell them here. You can compost them yourself if you have the space. you'll need to layer them with straw, house hold garbage and/or manure to get them to break down efficiently. Leaves tend to mat and can lay in a pile for a long time without breaking down if not layered or stirred up occasionally. The can be a great place for mosquitoes and other pesky bugs to breed so, definitely layer them and stir the pile once and while.

Watering Your Lawn

Even though temperatures might be cooler than in summer, your lawn still needs water as do all your landscape plants too. Late summer and fall can be very dry. Since lawn grasses continue to grow throughout the fall, watering is still important to sustain growth. Go ahead and water as needed until the ground is cold and beginning to freeze. If you have an automatic irrigation system, avoid damage by having it blown out with compressed air before water freezes in the pipes and sprinkler heads.. If it happens to rain a lot, you can skip this step. Fall watering is best done in the morning. Evening watering can work if that's what time you have to do it but you'll need to pay attention to what's going on out there. Fall nights tend to be cooler and longer than in Summer and that can cause fungus to grow on the soil if it doesn't get a chance to dry out once and a while.

Fertilizing Your Lawn

Apply a final dose of fertilizer in mid September - to late October. You'll provide your grass with nutrients that will be absorbed and stored until needed for spring growth. Lawns that have received late-season fertilizing are often the first to begin growing in the spring. Some lawns require fertilizer in November too, depending on how long your season is.

“Winterizing” types of fertilizers containing high amounts of phosphorus are only necessary if a reliable soil test indicates a shortage of phosphorus. If you need extra potash or phosphorous it can be supplied by using rock phosphate and natural jersey greensand available here. Synthetic varieties of these nutrients tend to be very soluble and leach from the soil too quickly to be of much use to the plants and the cause pollution. We recommend you use an organic lawn fertilizer like those sold here. Neptune's Harvest liquid organic fertilizer works great on lawns too. One 5 gallon pail can be enough for most people's needs for a full year and you can use it on everything else out there too. Keep it out of harms way and you can use it next year too. Just shake up the bucket before each use. It doesn't go bad. You can apply it with a sprayer or a watering can on small lawns and landscape plants.

Broad Leaf Weed Control

I really don't like the terms like broad leaf weeds. Fall is a good time to control perennial broad leaf weeds such as dandelions, plantain, clover, and creeping charlie(ground ivy) (If they bother you. I suggest you leave the clover at least). A number of weeds can be removed by hand. Plantain is one of the easiest weeds to pull by hand when it's small and/or you have nice loose soil. The roots are shallow and if you grab the whole plant, leaves and stems at once, it usually comes right up in one piece. If your weeds are few and scattered—or confined to a few small areas—spot-treating them with herbicide is usually sufficient. Weed-control products sold in ready-to-use spray containers make spot treatment easy. Be sure to complete treatments when temperatures are above 50 degrees—your herbicide needs time to do its job before winter cold sets in. (Organic BurnOut II and GeenMatch work almost immediately) Don't choose your weed-control strategy without a careful evaluation of the number and types of weeds in your lawn. Remember—you don't need to apply herbicides over your entire lawn unless there's extensive weed infestation, in which case, you might want to have a soil test done and check the pH and find out what's out of balance. Crab grass control can be accomplished by using nature and nurture. If it's really bad, tilling up the existing lawn and starting over may be your best strategy. you won't need to till 6" deep like a harden. A couple of inches of depth for most old lawns is enough. If you have compacted soil, a deeper tilling might be a good idea. Applications of compost and fertilizer before tilling is a good way to incorporate them into the soil. Don't apply corn gluten products when seeding new lawns or overseeding. corn gluten kills all seeds, including the ones you want.

The first hard frost will kill annual weedy grasses. What you have left is the seeds that will be left to come up in the spring. If your lawn is small you should try to pull up, by hand, as much of the crab grass as possible and put it in a long term compost pile that's active or if you're in the city use biodegradable bags and put it out by the curb for collection. Many progressive cities have free curbside pickup or free drop off points for compostable waste from the yard and kitchen. Contact you local street department or sanitation department or city hall to find out about these programs. If one doesn't exist, no time like the present for them to get on it! Our organic fertilizer program uses corn gluten as part of the fall fertilizer treatment. If you stick with the program year after year you will see a noticeable decline in the amount of crabgrass and other weeds in the lawn after the first two years of application. For new lawns and overseeding projects choose the program that's right for that application.

Seeding and Sodding Your Lawn

Fall is the best time of year to establish or repair lawns by over seeding or sodding unless you live in a very warm climate. Call your local extension agent for advice on what time of year is optimum for planting new grass. (lawn Tip) Seeding should be completed by mid-September in northern climates. Cool temperatures usually make fall seeding or sodding successful. Be sure to complete your sodding before very cold weather sets in. Rake the lawn area before you over seed to remove debris and dead grass. Raking also scarifies and loosens the surface of the soil a little bit, giving the lawn seeds a nice little place to find shelter and grow. Those little divots can be the whole world to a tiny seed. It's where the moisture from dew collects and they provide shelter from the wind and foot traffic while the seed germinates. When you seed a lawn for the first time or overseed an old lawn, save a little of the seed for applying later. There will always be trouble spots that are hard to get started so, saving a little of the seed for later will allow you to go back out there and repair any problems that come up using the same species of grass the rest of the lawn has. Keep foot traffic to a minimum while the new grass is establishing itself.

Fall and Winter Watering by J.E. Klett and C. Wilson adapted by John Meshna

Quick Facts...

- Water trees, shrubs and lawns during prolonged dry fall and winter periods to prevent root damage that affects the health of the entire plant.
- Water only when air and soil temperatures are above 40 degrees F with no snow cover.
- Established large trees have a root spread equal to or greater than the width and sometimes the height of the tree. Apply water to the most critical part of the root zone within the dripline. Dry air, low precipitation, little soil moisture, and fluctuating temperatures are characteristics of fall and winter in many areas of the north. There often can be little or no snow cover to provide soil moisture in winter nowadays thank to climate change, particularly from October through February. Trees, shrubs, perennials and lawns can be damaged if they do not receive supplemental water. The result of long, dry periods during fall and winter is injury or death to parts of plant root systems. Affected plants may appear perfectly normal and resume growth in the spring using stored food energy. Plants may be weakened and all or parts may die in late spring or early summer when temperatures rise. Weakened plants also may be subject to insect and disease problems.

Plants Are Sensitive to Drought Injury Woody plants with shallow root systems require supplemental watering during extended dry fall and winter periods. These include European white and paper birches; Norway, Silver, Red and Maples; Lindens, Alder, Hornbeams, Dogwood and Mountain Ash. Evergreen plants that

benefit include Spruce, Fir, Arborvitae, Yew, Oregon Grape-holly and Euonymus. Woody plants benefit from mulch to conserve soil moisture. Herbaceous perennials in exposed sites are more subject to winter freezing and thawing. This opens cracks in soil that expose roots to cold and drying. Winter watering combined with mulching can prevent damage. Lawns also are prone to winter damage. Newly established lawns, whether seed or sod, are especially susceptible to damage. Susceptibility increases for lawns with south or west exposures.

Watering Guidelines Water only when air temperatures are above 40 degrees F. Apply water at mid-day so it will have time to soak in before possible freezing at night. A solid layer (persisting for more than a month) of ice on lawns can cause suffocation or result in matting of the grass. Plants receiving reflected heat from buildings, walls and fences are more subject to damage. The low angle of winter sun makes this more likely in south or west exposures. Windy sites result in faster drying of sod and plants and require additional water. Monitor weather conditions and water during extended dry periods—one to two times per month without snow cover.

Newly Planted vs. Established Plants Newly planted trees are most susceptible to winter drought injury because they haven't had time to put out and extended root system yet. Woody trees generally take one year to establish for each inch of trunk diameter. For example, a two inch diameter (caliper) tree takes a minimum of two years to establish under normal conditions. Trees obtain water best when it is allowed to soak into the soil slowly to a depth of 12 inches. Methods of watering trees include: sprinklers, deep-root fork or needle, soaker hose or soft spray wand or just a plain old watering can with the rosette taken off. Apply water to many locations under the dripline and beyond if possible. If you use a deep-root fork or needle, insert no deeper than 8 inches into the soil. As a general survival rule when the soil is extremely dry apply 10 gallons of water for each diameter inch of the tree. For example, a two-inch diameter tree, needs 20 gallons per watering. Use a ruler to measure your tree's diameter. If the soil already has some moisture in it just water until the ground is soaked but not puddling on the surface. Newly planted shrubs require more water than established shrubs that have been planted for at least one year. The following recommendations assume shrubs are mulched to retain moisture. In dry winters, all shrubs benefit from winter watering from October through March. Apply 5 gallons two times per month for a newly planted shrub. Small established shrubs (less than 3 feet tall) should receive 5 gallons monthly. Large established shrubs (more than 6 feet) require 18 gallons on a monthly basis. Decrease amounts to account for precipitation. Water within the dripline of the shrub and around the base. Herbaceous perennial establishment periods vary. Bare root plants require longer to establish than container plants. Plants transplanted late in the summer or fall will not establish as quickly as plants planted in the spring. Winter watering is advisable with late planted perennials, bare root plants, and perennials located in windy or southwest exposures.

Fertilizer If your plants show signs of nutrient deficiency in the fall you can fertilize them but stay away from high nitrogen applications. You're not trying to make

them grow at this time of year. You're trying to prepare them for next spring and the cold months ahead, so provide them with low or no nitrogen fertilizers and biologically active products to help them store nutrients for the winter in the roots and be ready for growth in the spring. Organics "Kelp Booster", "Microbial Soil Conditioner", "Biotmatrix", "Plant Growth Activator Plus" , "Alfalfa Meal" and Kelp are recommended.

Pruning Light pruning of dead and diseased parts of the plants can be done in early fall but don't prune off large limbs and lots of tissue unless there's some really good reason to do so. Exposed tissue can be damaged by the cold and dry winds of the winter and won't heal over as fast in the fall leaving time for pathogens to get inside of the plants. Pruning times and regimens vary between different types of plants so a little research a head of time will help you figure out what to do.