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A GREAT LAWN STARTS IN THE FALL *(Cool Season Grasses)*

Everyone starts to think about lawn care as soon as Spring has sprung, but according to The Lawn Institute (www.thelawninstitute.org) the best way to get a great lawn is to fertilize in the Fall. When the daytime temperatures start to decrease, the natural response of cool season grasses (such as Kentucky Bluegrass and Tall Fescue) is to begin producing roots. In order to maximize root production it is important to make sure that soil fertility is at an optimum. During the difficult Summer months the turf plants lose root mass. When Fall arrives the plant tries to replace those roots (or hopefully build more than it started with). Think of it as hibernating animals storing up fat for the Winter. Actually the plant is hoping that the reserves will last all the way until next Fall.

Fertility should be timed to coincide with the plants natural instinct to produce roots; that means mid to late August in most areas. Another application should be applied around the end of October or whenever you stop needing to mow. This is highly productive because top growth has quit but the soil is still warm enough for grass to produce roots.

The first application should be made with a controlled release nitrogen source (50% water-insoluble nitrogen). One pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet is a good rate. The second application should be a quickly available nitrogen source (urea for example). Once again, one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet is a great recommendation. This nitrogen is used to produce carbohydrates that increase rooting. These carbohydrates will feed the grass when conditions are not favorable for the plant. Along with nitrogen it is also important to make sure that the turf has ample potassium. Potassium makes turfgrass more tolerant of stress. It actually helps the grass regulate its water use better. This reduces winter desiccation (drying out) and can decrease the plants susceptibility to some diseases. Both potassium and phosphorus applications should be based upon soil test recommendations. Many of our Midwest soils contain ample P and K and additions could be wasteful if not needed.

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