

Healthy Lawn Healthy Environment

Russ Welser
Ontario Co. Cornell Cooperative Extension

The lawn is a prominent feature of most home landscapes and provides many benefits. It has both aesthetic and environmental values. The lawn is an attractive green carpet that compliments and ties together the entire property. It helps to reduce noise, cools the property during summer, reduces soil erosion and improves air and water quality. It is no wonder we spend so much time and energy maintaining our lawns.

Increasingly, we are concerned about the environmental and human health risks associated with chemical pesticides and fertilizers. However, if we follow some basic lawn care principles and integrate our approach to pest management, we can reduce or eliminate these risks.

The following are some helpful suggestions to get you started on having a healthy lawn all year.

Spring

- Hold off fertilizing your lawn at this time. In general early spring fertilization stresses the lawn by promoting top growth at the expense of root growth. Instead fertilize your lawn at

the end of May (Memorial Day). Apply one pound of nitrogen per thousand square feet of lawn area using a balanced fertilizer as indicated by a soil test (**see coupon offer**).

- Begin mowing your lawn once the grass has reached a height of 4 to 4 1/2 inches tall. Set your mower height to three inches. Mowing your lawn at this height or higher will suppress weed establishment. Do not remove more than one third of the grass height with each mowing. This may mean mowing your lawn twice a week.
- Keep your mower blades sharp. Sharpen the blades after every 4 to 6 hours of use. Dull blades shred the ends of the grass, increasing potential disease problems and brown coloring of the lawn.

- Return the grass clippings to the yard during the mowing operation. This will reduce your fertilizer needs by 30 percent. Grass clippings do not contribute to a thatch problem. There should be no need to remove the clippings, if you keep up with the mowing frequency.
- Scout your lawn for pest presence (weeds, insects, diseases). Early detection and diagnosis is key in reducing pesticides.

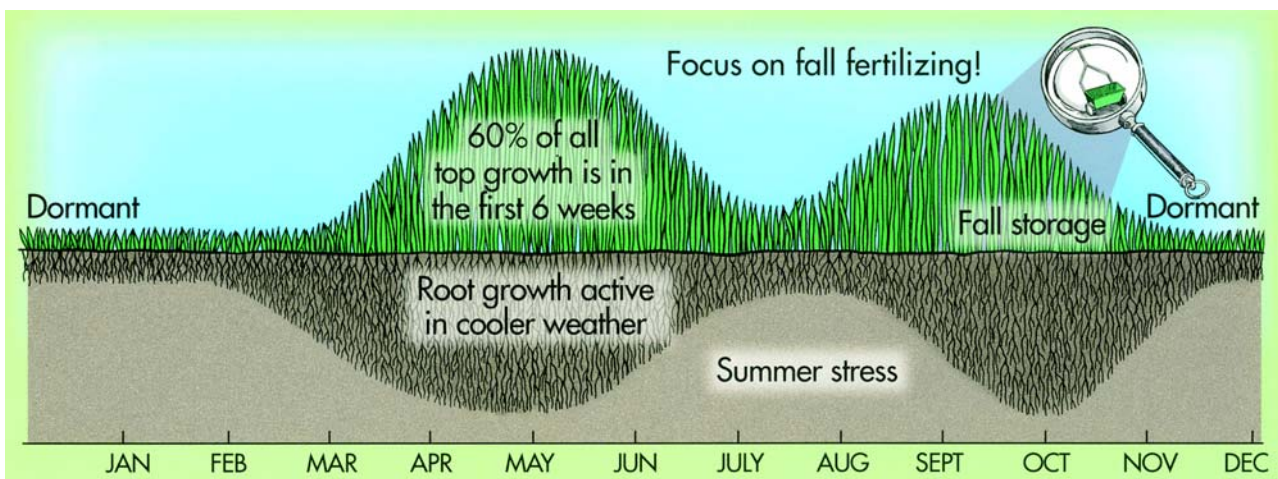
SOIL TESTING COUPON

****limited number of tests available****

This coupon entitles you to a HALF PRICE nutrient analysis (including pH, organic matter, phosphorus, and other soil minerals) performed by Cornell University. This is a \$12 value offered to you for only \$6.

Due to the limited number of discounts that will be provided, please call Cooperative Extension at 716-394-3977 ext. 38 to check on availability.

Funding for this offer is provided by watershed municipalities and the NYS Dept. of State through Title 11 of the NYS-Environmental Protection Fund.





Sampling Techniques

Turf for Grubs

Cut three sides of a 1-square-foot area of turf. Peel back and count grubs.

Sample a few areas approximately 20 yards apart.

Replace sod and water.

Flotation for Chinch Bugs

Insert coffee can (with both ends removed) at least 1 inch into soil and fill with water.

Insects will float to the surface in approximately 5 minutes.

Irritation for Sod Webworm and Cutworms

Mix 2 to 4 tablespoons of liquid dishwashing detergent with 1 gallon of water and pour over 1 square yard.

Insects will come to the surface in approximately 10 minutes.

Flush surface with water.

How to check to see if your lawn has grubs.

Summer

- If you have the available water and the means to irrigate your lawn or a portion of it to keep it green all summer, begin irrigating when rainfall is less than one inch per week. It is best to irrigate in the early morning.
- If you are not able to irrigate, you can prepare your lawn for drought conditions by gradually reducing the mowing height from three inches to two inches over a period of several weeks. When more frequent rains occur in late August to early September, raise your mowing height back to three inches.
- Mid-August to mid September is a good time to begin sampling for grubs in the lawn. Cut a square foot area of turf and peel it back. If you find 7 - 10 grubs per square foot you should consider your management options. Sample a few areas approximately 20 yards

apart. You may only need to treat a portion of your lawn.

- If necessary, fertilize your lawn the first of September (Labor Day). Apply one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn area using a balanced fertilizer, as indicated by a soil test (**see coupon**). Apply half the fertilizer to your lawn and apply the second half going perpendicular to the first application to achieve a uniform distribution of fertilizer.

Fall

- If necessary, late September is the best time for most chemical broadleaf weed control. Avoid applications when temperatures are below 50°F. or before an expected rainfall. Contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at (716) 394-3977 ext. 31 to determine if you should use pesticides.
- Continue mowing the lawn as long as the grass keeps grow-

ing. Tall grass left to go through the winter is more susceptible to the disease, snow mold.

- Rake up fallen leaves and place into a compost pile. Leaves left on the lawn may smother and kill the grass. Using a mulching mower would alleviate the need to rake up the leaves.
- Once again it may be necessary to fertilize your lawn. Apply one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn area using a balanced fertilizer, as indicated by a soil test (**see coupon**). Make your application after the grass has stopped making shoot growth. This will likely be between Halloween and Thanksgiving.

- Properly store your lawn supplies and equipment for the winter months.

Source:

The Homeowner's Lawn Care and Water Quality Almanac



To learn more about having a healthy lawn and the role you play in preserving water quality, order your copy of The Homeowner's Lawn Care and Water Quality Almanac for \$5. The Watershed Council, Watershed Task Force, and a state grant, have reduced this price from \$12. To get a copy of the Almanac call Kevin Olvany at (716) 396-3630.