

## Lawn Care Activities

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One of the major questions to answer when you are considering lawn care timing is the status of your lawn in terms of its growth. In most cases if your lawn is lush green right now, you are looking at weed growth, most likely rescue grass or annual bluegrass. We have not had many days of below freezing temperatures, but we have had enough cold weather for most St Augustine, Bermuda grass and zoysia grass lawns to be dormant. If the lawn grass is mostly in the sun, is growing in at least 6 inches of soil, and has been irrigated through the summer it is probably thick enough to not have many weeds and be a uniform brown colored surface.

It is too early to fertilize a lawn. The time to fertilize is after you have mowed real grass two times. It is effective to mow the rescue grass and annual bluegrass weed cover, but it is not recommended that it be fertilized. The weeds are already dominating the permanent lawn in the winter and to add fertilizer to the situation will just make the weeds even more dominant. If you mow the weedy grasses, they will look good for the winter without the need to irrigate or fertilize them. The recommended time to fertilize the permanent lawn usually turns out to be in late April or early May. Use a slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9.

One activity that is recommended right now is to aerate and top dress the lawn. San Antonio area soils are inclined to become compacted which means that it becomes increasingly more difficult for water, oxygen, and nutrients to penetrate and the root system becomes more and more restricted. Aeration is accomplished by renting an aerator from a big box store or rental company. The aerator should be one that penetrates the soil to cut plugs out that are distributed on the soil surface.

The aerators can be rented by the day or over several hours. A trailer is usually provided to transport the aerator. The actual work does not take very long. Three or four neighborhood lawns can be completed in a short day of aeration.

Top-dressing complements the aeration. It involves thinly spreading (1/2 inch) a layer of compost or top-dressing material on the lawn within a few days of when it has been aerated. The top-dressing sifts into the aeration channels to bring the benefits of organic material down into the roots of the grass. The benefits include increased water holding capability and improved drainage plus added nutrient efficiency.

The active ingredient in top dressing is the compost, a mix with sand costs about the same and the sand is largely a filler, so use pure compost.

There are landscaping companies that will do the aeration and top dressing for you at a reasonable price but doing it yourself is satisfying. The top-dress spreading is a day-dream job that allows you to work in the pleasant spring weather, get some exercise, and think about attractive movie stars or planned vacation trips.

Another important lawn care task that should be completed now is to apply a preemergent for the summer weeds, particularly sand burs and crabgrass. Among the recommended granular herbicides to use are Dimension, Amaze, or XL. Sand burs are a special problem. Their long germination period results

in the recommendation that a second application should be applied 90 days after this first application. It is best to apply the preemergent before March 15 and then again by June 15.