

## Fall Lawn Situation

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This is a key time in the lawn care regime, and it has been complicated by the dry, hot weather we have experienced.

**Lawn Fertilization**-- If you have been able to irrigate your lawn and it is relatively green, it is time for the fall fertilization. Fertilizing with "winterizer" product with a 3-1-2 ratio of nitrogen to phosphorous and potassium will increase the lawn's ability to tolerate cold weather and contributes to a fast green-up in the spring. An example of a 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer is 18-6-12. Eighteen percent is a nitrogen source, 6 per cent is a phosphorous source and 12% is a potassium source. "Winterizer" fertilizers have a fast release nitrogen source so that the nitrogen can be quickly absorbed by the plant and organized within the cells to provide the required chemistry for winter cold tolerance and fast spring green-up.

All that works well if the lawn grass is green and capable of transpiring to pull the nitrogen into the roots and up into the plant. If the lawn grass is brown, there is much less of the movement of water through the plant (transpiration) and the nitrogen is not taken up. That probably means that the nutrients in the fertilizer would be wasted or else utilized by the germinating winter weeds!

For the brown lawns this year it may not be efficient to fertilize, Wait until next spring.

**Preemergent Herbicide**—Normally the recommended time to apply a preemergent herbicide to prevent weeds such as bedstraw, dandelions, thistles, chickweed, henbit, rescue grass, annual bluegrass and beggar's lice is September 1. This year, however, it may work to apply a product such as Amaze, Dimension or XL in early October because with the dry hot weather there has not been much seed germination.

In fact, if your lawn area and vacant lots are brown and sparsely covered with vegetation' the weeds can be expected to fill the available space very quickly once the temperatures cool and we get some rain. It won't be unusual for the ground to be covered with deep, lush bedstraw or rescue grass!

**Winter Lawnmowing**—Based on my experiences there does not seem to be any real advantage to mow lower in the winter or to mow taller than you have been doing during the summer. The key is to keep mowing, especially if you did not apply any preemergent herbicide. Mowing once week or even once every two weeks will do a pretty good job of keeping the weeds under control. Rescue grass, annual bluegrass and horseherb respond especially well to frequent mowing. With mowing the weeds can become the "sustainable winter lawn", attractively green all winter without irrigation.

**New and Existing Shade Trees** – Shade trees are an important part of the landscape and lawn performance. If you want more shade to reduce air conditioning costs and to make it more pleasant to be outside in our hot weather, well placed shade trees are important. The fall is the best time to plant them. Among the recommended varieties are live oak, Texas red oak, Mexican white oak, cedar elm, Mexican sycamore, chinkapin oak, and bur oak. On the other hand, mature shade trees in the long term

reduce the amount of sun available for lawn grass growth. It is not unusual to have so much shade that even St Augustine grass will not perform well. In my opinion the shade is more valuable than a thick lush lawn. Besides if you have too much shade for lawn grass, there are many shade tolerant groundcovers that can replace grass. Liriope, sedge, mondo grass, English ivy, Asiatic jasmine, and dwarf ruellia are good options.