**Lawn Care in February**

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As much as you want to rush your lawn green up this spring, it does not do any good to fertilize the lawn early. Our hot weather grasses can only take up the nitrogen from fertilizer after they have an active top growth. Wait to fertilize your lawn until you have mowed real grass two times. That will be between April 15 and May 1 most years.

Lawn green-up is mostly determined by the weather with the help of nutrients that were collected and stored last fall. The fall fertilization has more influence on spring green-up than the spring fertilizer.

In terms of lawn health, the most beneficial thing you can do is to aerate and top dress the lawn.

Rent an aerator that cuts plugs from the lawn and lays them on the lawn surface. The aeration helps address soil compaction by letting air, water and nutrients penetrate to the root system.

It is also important to have routes for gases to escape from the soil if roots are going to survive and function appropriately.

Aeration contributes greatly to lawn performance. The impact can be even greater if the aeration is complemented by top dressing.

Top dressing is the act of spreading a thin layer of compost over the surface of the lawn after the aeration. Some of the compost filters into the aeration channels to bring organic material into the root zone.

The organic material does not block the channels; it lets air move in and out just as well as the clear openings. What it does is improve nutrient- and water-holding capabilities and encourages microorganism activity. The combination of aeration and top dressing with compost is magic elixir for your lawn.

Note that you will get to choose between compost and a product called “top dressing.” If the “top dressing” includes sand, pass it by in favor of pure compost. Sand is filler and compost is the active ingredient.

Applying compost is a good “daydream” job. You do not have to concentrate where you are spreading it. Half an inch over the whole lawn is the desirable result but the application does not need to be perfect. You can enjoy the fine weather and receive some good exercise while you think about fishing, movie stars or fine food!

There are also contractors that will complete the task for you at a reasonable cost. Ask your horticultural materials retailer about contractors. The supplier will also help you calculate how much compost you need if math is not your favorite subject.

Visit the Water Conservation and Technology Center’s website to read my November column about compost for the calculator method if you prefer: <http://wctc.tamu.edu/columns/articles/2012/11/essential-ingredients-for-good-lawns-and-gardens/>

Horticulture material suppliers include Keller Material, Fertile Garden Supply, Quality Organic Products and GardenVille.

The winter weeds have germinated and are going to try to produce seeds for next winter’s crop. Keep them mowed or pulled to prevent seed production. You can apply a contact herbicide to kill the growing plants but the action can be unpredictable in cold weather.

To prevent summer weeds, apply a pre-emergent herbicide in late February or early March. Portrait is a good product to prevent broadleaf weeds. Crabgrass Control, Amaze and XL all do a good job at preventing crabgrass and sandburs.