

Don't Fertilize, Aerate, Top Dress and Mow the Leaves Instead!
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It is too early to fertilize the lawn. Wait until approximately May 1 when our hot weather grasses have had time to put on top growth and expand their root system. Only then are they most capable of taking up the nutrients in the fertilizer. If you fertilize now the weeds benefit more than the grass, and the volatile nitrogen can be loss to the air, run-off or leaching. Instead, aerate and top dress the lawn.

Most soils in the San Antonio area are inclined to become compacted even without much traffic. The soils also use up their organic material. To address compacted soils and soils without organic material, consider aerating and top dressing your lawn this month.

If you do not want to do it yourself, find a contractor to do the job. Ask Fertile Garden Supply, New Earth, Quality Organic, Keller Material or other compost suppliers who they recommend. ABC Pest Control is a Company that offers the services.

You can aerate and top dress on your own. Rent an aerator that cuts the plugs out of the soil and deposits them on the soil surface. Home Depot and Quality Organic are among the companies that have aerators for rent. It doesn't take long to aerate a lawn, so see if your neighbors want to share the machine.

The channels created by the aerator allow air, water and nutrients to penetrate to the grass roots. They also allow gases to escape.

If you spread one-half inch of compost after the lawn is aerated, the compost filters into the channels to bring organic material, with all of its benefits, into the root zone.

Spreading compost is not a precision job. It is good exercise and allows you to spend some time outside. Daydream about how well your lawn will look or the Spurs winning another championship.

Order compost for top dressing from the horticultural supply stores listed earlier in the article. They will deliver the material for about \$50/cubic yard.

One cubic yard of compost will be enough material to top dress 648 square feet of lawn.

I recommend that you use compost rather than a top-dressing mix that includes sand. The sand is useful if you are using the top-dressing to level the lawn or fill gaps between sod strips. The compost is the active ingredient for enriching the lawn with organic material, the sand is filler.

It is not necessary to water in the compost.

If you are going to apply pre-emergent herbicide to the lawn, wait until after you finish aerating and top-dressing. The aeration and top dressing will reduce the effectiveness of the pre-emergent because it breaks the surface seal that most pre-emergents use as the mechanism to prevent weed germination.

In cold climates and in areas where trees are larger and thicker, leaves can accumulate and overwhelm the lawn. In Central Texas the leaves decompose in three or four weeks. The decomposed leaves add organic material and limited nutrients to the soil. To speed up the process, mow the leaves.

If you have leaf raking in your genes and feel you must collect them, use the leaves as mulch around your shrubs and trees. Leaves also work well as mulch and paths in flower and vegetable gardens.

What you don't want to do is bag up the leaves for the landfill. It is a double waste! The leaves unnecessarily fill expensive landfill space and the organic material is wasted.

If you must bag the leaves up, give them to a neighbor to use in his/her compost pile or as mulch.

If you want to learn more about raising spring vegetables join me for a free class this morning, March 10 from 9:30-10:30am at 6800 Dorothy Louise Drive. All attendees will receive a free Rodeo tomato plant. Dorothy Louise Dr. intersects Babcock w of Loop 410 in the Medical Center. The class is sponsored by the Dreamhill Estates Neighborhood and Milberger's Nursery.