Lawn Aeration and Top Dressing

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It is too early to fertilize the lawn for the year but two things that can be done now and have major impact on lawn performance are aeration and top-dressing.

Aeration is the process of cutting channels into the lawn and removing the soil plugs so that air and moisture can penetrate to the root system and waste gases can escape. The easiest way to do this is to rent an aerator that cuts the plugs and lays them on the lawn surface. When the job is finished the lawn looks like someone has left lots of cigar stubs behind. The plugs break-up after a few days and you are left with less-compacted soil and a healthier lawn.

After aerating the lawn, you can increase the positive impact of aeration by applying a half-inch layer of compost to the lawn. The compost filters into the aeration channels and not only do you have channels for oxygen to reach the grass roots, organic material and all its benefits reach the root area.

You do not need to be fussy about applying the top-dressing, it is a day dream job. A good way to get some exercise, enjoy the great winter weather and daydream about movie stars, fishing success, winning the lottery, or whatever else pleases you. All this while you are making a major contribution to an attractive healthy lawn.

You can purchase the compost from one of the excellent horticultural supply companies in town including Quality Organic, Keller Material, Fertile Garden Supply, New Earth Products or GardenVille. Take your pick-up truck to their lot for a load or ask them to deliver the material.

Quality Organic has a “quantity calculator” on their website and some of the others may also, or you can call the supplier with you lawn dimensions and they will calculate the amount you need. One cubic yard at one-half inch deep will cover 648 sq. ft. of lawn (approx. 20 by 32 ft.). A large lawn that is 100 ft. by 100 ft. will require 15 cu yds. of compost.

I recommend compost rather than “top-dressing” because the top-dressing, sold for about the same price as compost includes sand which I consider is a filler. The compost is the active ingredient.

Concerning the aerator, they can be rented at various places around the City of San Antonio including American All Rent, Blanco Rentals and 10 different Home Depots. In my calls to various rental companies I did not find any that would deliver the machines to your address. That used to be a service provided and still may exist so try your favorite rental company first.

Most of the time you can complete the aeration easily in 2 hours. One rental outlet offered a two hour rental for $30. Four hour fees varied from $57 to $65. The machine could be rented all day for $65 to $82. Consider sharing a rental with one or more neighbor.

If you do not want to do the aeration and top-dressing yourself, at least one lawn care company, ABC Services will do it for a fee.