**Weekly Express-News Article**

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Lawn Care Questions

Q. When should I fertilize my lawn this spring to maximize early green-up?

1. Spring green-up is dependent on weather conditions and lawn condition rather than any spring fertilization. The fall fertilization has more influence on spring green-up than any fertilization applied in the spring. Mark your calendar for October 1 for the fall fertilization in 2012 and wait until May 1 for the spring fertilization. Our hot weather grasses, St. Augustine, Bermuda, Zoysia, and buffalo grass require a period of warm soil to expand their root systems, and top growth enough to utilize nutrients in the spring.

Q. When should I begin watering the lawn every week in the spring? I like a green lawn.

A. In terms of lawn appearance and lawn health it is a waste of water to irrigate every week in the spring. Irrigate when the soil dries out, about every 3 weeks if it does not rain until the weather gets warm. About May 1 start watching the lawn close, and irrigate when your footprints do not spring back as you walk across it. That response indicates that the lawn could use more water. Many years the weekly irrigation need may not begin until July. The deeper the soil the longer you can wait between lawn water applications.

Q. When do I need to begin mowing the lawn on a regular basis?

A. Mow the lawn when it needs it. I am not being sarcastic. My lawn is dominated by a winter weed, rescue grass, right now so it looks better if I mow it every 2 weeks. Mowing every two weeks prevents weeds from forming seed heads. I will also mow my lawn when the live oak leaves fall. They decompose to benefit the lawn. Mowing speeds up the process. Regular lawn growth often does not start in earnest until April.

Q. Is there anything we can do now to get our winter weeds under control? We have dandelions, thistle, henbit, annual bluegrass, and rescue grass.

A. Next year apply a pre-emergent herbicide in August or early September. This year a contact herbicide could be applied to control the broadleaf weeds. 2-4-D products are effective if you have Bermuda, zoysia or buffalo grass. Some formulas will have a negative effect on St. Augustine grass. Review the labels of Weed B Gon and similar products at your favorite retail nursery.

Q. Last year sand burs and crab grass dominated my summer lawn. You advised that I apply a pre-emergent herbicide such as Amaze or XL in late winter. Is now the time?

A. Apply Amaze or XL to prevent summer weeds in late February or early March.

I rely on mowing to keep the winter weeds under control and prevent seed production.

Q. My lawn did not fare well in last year’s drought and I want to start over. What do you recommend?

A. The number one thing is to figure out why your lawn did not survive the drought and address each of the issues.

* Do you have at least 6 inches of soil under the lawn?
* Did you select a drought tolerant lawn grass variety? Floratam St. Augustine, zoysia, and Bermuda grass seem to be the most successful in our conditions.
* Were you aware of the watering limitations and did you take advantage of the flexibility allowed? The water restrictions require attention to follow but your lawn will survive if you follow the rules.
* Is your irrigation system capable of watering a lawn efficiently?
* Have you considered less grass and more mulch, groundcovers, hardscape, shrubs, and perennials?
* Wait until we escape our current drought before tackling a major landscape renovation.

Q. What is the one best thing to be doing to improve my lawn this winter?

A. How about 2 things done in tandem – aerate and top dress the lawn? Rent an aerator and then apply a quarter to half inch of compost over the surface. The aeration opens up compacted soil to air, water, and nutrient penetration to the root system. The compost filters into the aeration channels to bring organic material with all its benefits to the root system. For more information on aeration and top dressing visit “[www.plantanswers.com](http://www.plantanswers.com).”

Q. What happen if I leave the leaves to decompose on my lawn rather than raking them up?

A. They decompose and benefit the lawn. If the leaves are too thick to leave them in place, mow them up. The small pieces decompose faster than whole leaves.

Leaves can also be used for mulch or as raw material for the compost pile.