

Year Round Gardening

Get Your Lawn Ready for Winter

Fredricka Bogardus, Colorado Master Gardener

Winter is coming. As we approach cold weather, there are a few things we can do to help turf get ready for next spring. During autumn, plants, including your lawn, continue to manufacture carbohydrates by photosynthesis. Those carbohydrates are stored in the root system to provide energy to the plant when dormancy halts photosynthesis. That energy store in the roots will help the plant survive the dormant season, and will fuel the early spring growth. The following tips will enhance that energy storage, yielding a healthier and greener lawn next spring.



Mow as needed but don't scalp your lawn. Too short mowing will stimulate foliage growth at the expense of root energy storage. Grass height should be maintained at about 2 ½ to 3 inches.

Irrigate as needed.

Spot treat perennial lawn weeds like dandelions. Use a product labeled for control of broadleaf weeds in turf. Apply while the weed is still green. Fall treatment of perennial weeds is more effective than spring treatments.

Leaves on your turf should be removed if they are more than a few inches deep. If they are not too thick run them through a mulching lawn mower a couple of times, finely shredded leaves will break down over the winter and benefit the lawn. You can mow, and bag the leaves for use as mulch in gardens, or compost them. If you absolutely must dispose of leaves take them to a recycling center like Rocky Top Resources for

composting. You can take materials to Rocky Top Resources any Saturday for no charge if you bring a non-perishable food donation for the Care and Share Food Bank. Consult www.rockytopresources.com/ for more information.

Fertilize cool season grasses, such as Kentucky Blue Grass, Rye or Fescue, late September to mid-October. Choose a fertilizer which has fast release nitrogen. Fast release Nitrogen does not rely on soil microbes to make the Nitrogen available to plants. Examples are urea, or ammonium sulfate. Soil microbes slow their activity during cold weather, use of a slow release product, may make the late season application less effective. Apply when the ground is moist, and before the ground freezes. If you apply fertilizer now, you can skip the March-April fertilizer application.

Winter water, perhaps once a month. If you have trees in your lawn this is especially important for the trees. Wait for a calm day with a temperature of at least 40°f in the middle of the day, and no snow covering the ground. Apply water slowly. If the ground is frozen hard you do not need to apply much water just enough to dampen the soil, if not frozen then water enough that the soil is damp a few inches below the surface. Then just sit back and wait for that glorious spring green up!

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research-based answers. Get answers to your horticulture questions by visiting ask.extension.org or by calling a Colorado Master Gardener Volunteer at 520-7684, 9:00 to 12:00 Mondays and Wednesdays.