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Grass

Sometimes the ideas for these articles call to me, literally. I have received many calls in the last week surrounding the main topic of grass. Inquiring individuals want to know what type to grow, when to fertilize, how to seed it and when to seed.

The lack of rain this summer has likely played havoc with many lawns in our area. This may be why so many questions regarding lawn care are coming into the office.

If your yard is in need of a dense stand of turf to ward off weeds then you must first make a decision. Decide if you like what is, or was, growing in your yard or if you want something different. Once you decide you can continue toward the goal of a healthy carpet of soft grass.

The warm season grasses that work in the southeast area are Bermuda grass and Zoysia grass. Bermuda, as many of you may know is VERY aggressive and often considered a weed to those who like flowers and ornamental plants. Like Bermuda, Zoysia is green throughout the summer when it is hot and goes dormant between November and April. Unlike Bermuda, it is a slow growing and therefore not aggressive. Each of these warm season grasses is usually sprigged or applied as sod into the yard which is more expensive than seeding but can be done easily.

If you don't like dormant grass in winter then your option is to go with cool season grasses. These are the grasses that turn brown in July and August in our area because it is too hot for their growth. If you can tolerate dormant grass in August but prefer to have green in fall, winter and spring then you may want to consider growing bluegrass or fescue. These grass types are usually seeded so they are less expensive.

Maintenance is very different for each type of grass. Warm season grasses are put down in the spring just before warm temperatures start. This creates an ideal growing environment for the grass. Cool season grasses are seeded now, in September, as their ideal growing conditions are occurring with our weather.

Likewise, fertilizer should also be applied when the best growing conditions occur for the plants. For warm season grasses apply fertilizer in May and then follow with applications

in June, July and August. For cool season grasses you would apply fertilizer in May to support spring growth and then wait until cool weather returns in the fall and fertilize each month; September, October and sometimes again in November.

If you do decide to seed, sod or sprig new grass, do it at the appropriate time for the type of grass you want in your yard. You will need to make sure you have prepared the soil accordingly.

When seeding an entire lawn you will till it up after adding the appropriate amendments based on a soil test. Run a rake over the soil to create a loose seed bed and then broadcast the seed. Cover with straw and keep moist until germination. New turf will still need watering after it germinates but does not require daily moisture.

If you are over seeding then you first need to apply the appropriate herbicide to kill any weeds that are present. Do not use a pre-emergent if you are going to put seed down. Use a vertical cutter to bring a small amount of soil to the surface, broadcast seed and rake it into soil and keep the seed moist until it germinates.

Sprigs of Zoysia can be applied in spring by planting the sprigs every 6 inches and maintaining moisture in the sprigs until they germinate. They may also be broadcast over the yard and covered with straw but sprigs cannot be allowed to dry out in either case. If you broadcast the sprigs you will need to water at least three times per day in order to prevent the sprigs from drying out.

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