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Putting Your Lawn to Bed

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GARDEN NOTES

PUTTING YOUR LAWN TO BED

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Lawns have a wicked sense of humor. They fight you all summer and then, just when it is about to start snowing, they get all green and glowing.

The main problem in Utah is that we grow cool-season grasses which do not appreciate our hot, dry summers, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. This year has been particularly bad for many lawns. Extreme heat stresses cool-season lawns making them vulnerable to insects and other damage. Ironically, many landscape pests enjoy the heat, which makes them develop even more voracious appetites.

Summer's worries are over and most lawns *will* survive to live another year, he says. However, a few lawns may need a little extra effort this fall to help them recover and look their best next year. In the fall most insects decide it's too cool to eat, so instead of dining on lawns they retreat into the soil or find another cozy place to wait out the winter. Lawn insects lack of appetite in the fall makes them hard to control. The best thing homeowners can do is repair the damage, and get the lawn as healthy as possible.

Fall is the best time to give the lawn a good fertilization to build up its strength, Goodspeed says. Apply one-half to one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn. Go to your favorite nursery or garden center and ask for their best lawn fertilizer. It should be high in nitrogen which is the first number on the a bag.

"If your lawn has been ravished by a few aggressive insects, a good fertilization program is even more important to get it back to healthy before next year's onslaught," Goodspeed says. "If large patches of lawn are dead or missing, consider moving or start over. Square-up the bad looking parts of the lawn and remove all the weeds and dead areas. Then work those areas over with a tiller, and mix in a little organic matter to improve the soil. Once the area is cleaned up and tilled, plant new grass seed or throw down sod to replace the grass that sacrificed itself to greedy grubs."

Next, water the areas like you would any new grass seed. Then, about the end of October, give it another good application of fertilizer. By spring the area should be green and growing once again, and ready for next years invasion of root munching pests.

If your yard has just a few, small dead areas, there may be an easier way than digging and tilling, Goodspeed says. One effective method of reclaiming damaged areas is aerating and re-

seeding. Go over the problem spots three or more times with a core aerator until they resemble a peg board, then broadcast some good grass seed on top. The grass seed should fall into the small holes left by the aerator, which gives them a great location for germinating and growing. This also protects them from some of the daily traffic, plus the holes help maintain the moisture level. After the seeds are broadcasted, water like you would a newly-seeded lawn, he explains. The grass should start growing and fill in this fall so it will look good again by spring.

Another option is to hire someone who has a grass drill, he says. These machines drill the small grass seed into the existing lawn. Clean up the area as much as possible using a rake (or a teenager) before drilling the seed. Once the area is seeded, water regularly to ensure good germination and establishment.

The good news is, most lawns can be reinvigorated and will look great again next spring,” Goodspeed says. “The bad news is, insects are creatures of habit, they tend to return to the scene of the crime time after time.”

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