Spring Lawn Planning

I consider thoughts of spring to be therapeutic and with the days obviously getting longer, planning for spring is a good idea. Most of the lawns in our area are cool season variety based. This means that these lawn grasses grow most vigorously as soil temperatures run consistently in the 50s. By comparison, warm season grass seeds will not germinate until soils reach a sustained 60 degrees

. Although the spring is not the ideal time to establish cool-season turfgrasses, the majority of cool-season turfgrass seed is sold and planted at this time. Spring is not the optimal time because cool-season grass planted in the spring has such a small window of opportunity to develop a mature plant with an extensive root system before the summer months approach. Cool-season turfgrasses are adapted to climates where daytime high temperatures are in the 60° to 75°F range. Much of Virginia will experience daily high temperatures exceeding this range by early June, and the temperatures will remain above optimal levels through at least August. If you can delay establishment until fall, your chances of success are far greater. However, there are many situations that require spring establishment (new construction sites, renovation projects following the loss of turf over the past fall/winter season, etc.), and your chances for success can be enhanced by considering the following strategies.

Many of the fertilizer products available to homeowners to initiate spring fertility programs are "first step" components in a commercially available four- or five-step lawn-care programs designed for the entire growing season (spring through fall). The quality and handling characteristics of the products are usually exceptional. However, the levels of nitrogen contained in the mid-spring and summer steps in the program often exceed the recommended levels that cool-season turfgrasses can efficiently utilize in the spring and summer months. The application of one-half to one pound of water-soluble nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of lawn during the early to mid-spring is acceptable, but additional nitrogen can be detrimental to cool-season turf.

If a nutrient is not used by the plant, it is subject to loss, and this is both economically and environmentally irresponsible. While aggressive spring and summer nitrogen fertilization will likely lead to lush, dark green foliage, this growth is often at the expense of the root system and the process of food storage. An inadequate root system due to excessive spring nitrogen results in a turf that struggles to survive as the stresses of summer arrive.

The best way to minimize pests is to maintain a healthy, dense turf. You can achieve this by following sound management programs based on the principles previously discussed and by buying the correct turfgrass for the situation. The seed of many cultivars of tall fescue and perennial ryegrass is marketed as "endophyte enhanced." This means that the seed you are purchasing contains a living fungus that is highly desirable! We most often think of disease and bad looking lawns when we think about fungi and turf, but in this case the fungus within the seed (and ultimately your turfgrass) helps reduce the likelihood of attack by insect and disease pests (reduce, not eliminate, pest attack). For situations where tall fescue or perennial ryegrass are used, it is well worth paying a few pennies more per pound to purchase "endophyte enhanced" seed.

Summer annual grasses (crabgrass, goosegrass, foxtail, etc.) are the most common targets for preemergent herbicide treatment in the spring but many other grass and broadleaf weeds also germinate as soil temperatures warm and days grow longer. The rapid growth potential of these summer annual weeds warrants the use of preemergent herbicides to prevent weed germination and the subsequent reduction in turfgrass quality. The key to the effectiveness of preemergent herbicides is timing the applications to before the weeds emerge. Mother Nature provides reminders for proper preemergent herbicide treatment timing in the form of the following ornamental plants: daffodils, forsythia, and dogwoods. Apply preemergent herbicides for crabgrass and other summer annual weeds when these plants are blooming prolifically. Forsythia and daffodils bloom early in this window of application, and dogwoods bloom at the end of the recommended application period.

In addition to applications of herbicides alone, many formulations of "weed-and-feed" materials (products with a preemergent herbicide impregnated on a fertilizer carrier) are popular in spring lawn applications. If you select weed-and-feed materials with high percentages of nitrogen, choose sources that are predominantly slow-release nitrogen (as indicated on the label). This reduces the chance of overstimulating the shoot growth of cool-season turfgrasses at the expense of the root system.

Upcoming Events

Feb 14-17 National Farm Machinery Show, Louisville KY

Feb 15- Mar 28 Master Cattleman Zoom Meetings, Every Thursday evening from 6:30 to 8:30

Feb 16 Deadline to consign calves to March VQA Sale

Feb 27 Smyth Washington Cattleman Association Meeting, Washington Co Fairgrounds 6:30

Mar 19 VQA Sale

Mar 25 VQA Steer Take Up

Mar 26 Smyth Washington Cattleman Association Meeting, Washington Co Fairgrounds 6:30

Mar 27 VQA Heifer Take Up

Jun 13-15 OGATA Summer Tractor Show, Fairview Homestead, 908 Hillman Hwy, Abingdon

July 1-5 Smyth County 4-H Camp, sign-ups and deposits being taken now!

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at (276) 783-5175/TDD (800) 828-1120) during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.

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