

NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

October 7, 2024

Fall Lawn Care & Winter Prep

Options in fall lawn care practices fade as fall advances. Preparing lawns for winter is not a complex process but there are guidelines that go a long way in assuring lawns come through winter in good condition.

With unpredictable October weather, timing of some lawn care practices becomes unsure.

Seeding, for example, is the most susceptible to the weather and mid-September was considered the cutoff date for fall seeding.

Seeding is less likely to be successful as each day passes, as new seedlings may not have time to develop and harden off before the hard freezes of winter set in. Seeding options include waiting until next spring or dormant seeding in extremely late fall.

Dormant seeding success depends on how winter goes; ideally snow will fall shortly after seeding and snow cover remains until spring.

Mid fall nitrogen fertilization can run the risk of lawns going into winter too succulent. This may set them up for winter damage and excess snow mold disease development. Again, playing the percentages says to wait until spring. Early September was the key time to fertilize.

Early October can be a suitable time to manage dandelions and other perennial broadleaf weeds with herbicides but becomes less effective as fall advances. The key here is to make sure weeds are still actively growing so herbicides should perform as expected. Freezing weather and dry soil may cause weeds to go dormant.

Mowing until the lawn stops growing is the most important lawn care practice for the balance of fall. Lawns going into winter excessively tall are prime candidates for snow mold disease development and damage from voles, or field mice. Mow as needed until top growth stops, so monitor your lawn growth carefully. If you want to set the mower a little shorter than normal that is okay, but the final mowing does not need to be excessively short.

The other primary practice to prepare your lawn for winter is cleaning up fallen leaves and other debris before snow covers the lawn. Leaves sitting on the lawn all winter can also promote diseases and smother the grass if piled too deeply.

It is not unusual to have patches of different colored grasses in lawns as we advance through fall. This is primarily caused by some grasses turning brown or yellow as they go dormant faster than others that may still be green. Even different cultivars of the same species, such as Kentucky bluegrass, may vary in how fast they go dormant.

Interested in learning more about Horticulture in Iron County?

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