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12 SPRING LAWN CARE TIPS TO ENSURE A BEAUTIFUL YARD ALL YEAR LONG

Dethatch With a Rake - Thatch is essentially dead or dying grass shoots and a little bit (less than 1/2 an inch) of it is actually good for your lawn, but too much thatch can suffocate it. For warm-season grasses, early spring is the perfect time to rake away this debris that can encourage pests and disease. An intense removal of thatch can be rough on your lawn, so make sure you do it at the beginning of a growth period so your lawn can recover properly. For heavy thatch removal (more than one-inch thick), consider a power rake. Otherwise, a stiff yard rake should do the trick.

Test Your Soil pHA - Healthy lawn needs soil with a balanced pH level, usually between five to seven, depending on the type of grass. If the pH level is too high (alkaline), you can add sulfate with a broadcast spreader. If your pH level is too low (acidic), you can add lime the same way. Be sure to read the directions on additives to make sure you don't over- or under-treat your lawn. Once adjustments have been made, water the lawn and test the soil pH again in 30 days.

Aerate the Lawn - Compacted soil keeps your lawn from thriving. By aerating the lawn during a high growth period, you loosen the soil so water and nutrients are better absorbed and roots have room to grow. There are lots of ways to go about aerating, depending on the size of the job. Aeration shoes or manual push aerators are perfect for small lawns, but if your yard is considerably larger, consider renting a gas-powered aeration tool. Late spring is the perfect time to aerate warm-season grasses like Bahia, St. Augustine and Bermuda, so the grass has time to heal from the process.

Weed + Feed - Weed and feed is a spring ritual for many lawn enthusiasts but beware of overdoing it. Late spring is the best time to do this; just make sure you actually have a major weed problem before treating your entire lawn. Too many chemicals can stress the plant's roots, putting your lawn at risk during the intense heat of summer. Consider spot-spraying or pulling broadleaf weeds (dandelions) and applying slow-release fertilizer only if needed.

Deal With Bare Spots - Once your lawn begins to green back up in the spring, you may notice a few dips or bare spots. Don't panic — you can deal with these areas by flushing the spot with water, raking out any dead grass, then leveling it out with sand and soil, as needed. Reseed with your grass variety and water regularly until the new grass is fully established.

Seed the Lawn - Whether you're starting from scratch or nursing an existing lawn back to health, seeding is an important task you want to get right. Early spring is a good time to do this. Just keep in mind that colder soil conditions may slow growth down a bit. You can also seed in the fall if you miss the window!

Know Your Varieties - Depending on where you live, your commitment to lawn maintenance and the type of sunlight you get will dictate which grass variety will work best for your yard and lifestyle. Warm-season grasses spread by runners to create a thick mat of turf and thrive in hot sunny regions. If you live in the south and erosion is an issue for you, then this type of grass could be a problem-solver. Cool-season grasses like ryegrass and fescues are considered "bunch" grasses and perform well in slightly shady yards and climates with major temperature fluctuations. Do your homework before you invest in pricey pallets of sod or take on a major seeding to ensure the very best result.

Water It Well - All grass needs water, and depending on the type of turf you have, that amount will vary. If you can't spring for an elaborate in-ground irrigation system, that's OK. The next best thing is a well-placed sprinkler on a basic timer. Outdoor timers are relatively inexpensive (around \$35) and ensure you don't forget those early-morning watering sessions. Simply attach the timer to your exterior water spigot, then attach a garden hose to the bottom of the timer. Turn the water on, and the timer will control the water flow to the sprinkler.

Maintain Your Mower - Take care of your mower, and it'll take care of your lawn. Sharp blades are important so cuts are crisp and the grass heals quickly after cutting. Fresh gas and spark plugs will keep your mower in peak performance mode. If your mower needs a tune-up or repairs, some small-engine technicians make house calls, so ask around. Mowers aren't cheap and with a bit of annual maintenance, yours can last for many years.

Avoid Short Cuts - When it comes to cutting the grass, less is more. Don't scalp your lawn, especially cool-season varieties or "bunch" grasses. A good rule of thumb is to never cut more than the top third of the blade off; otherwise, it could stress the plant and cause unsightly browning. Cool-season grasses have an ideal height of around two to four inches tall. Warm-season grasses are shorter and may require more sessions pushing that mower.

Mow in Varied Directions - We all know that a diagonal cut looks fancy, but did you know that mixing up your mowing direction is actually good for your lawn? By mowing in varied directions you ensure a more uniform cut, an upright growth pattern and reduce soil compaction.

Leave the Clippings - If you abide by the 1/3 rule, your grass clippings are essentially a natural mulch for your lawn. Clippings are rich in organic compounds and will help feed your lawn, so don't bother bagging them up. Just make sure you mow when the lawn is dry so the clippings don't clump up.

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