



Fall is the Time to Work on Your Lawn

September is an ideal time to give your lawn some tender care. Our lawns grow best in cooler weather and still have several months to work on their roots before the ground freezes. Your lawn's overall health depends on the state of the soil and a healthy lawn is the best defense against weeds, not the use of herbicides. Here's how you can improve your lawn this fall:

Core-aerate: This procedure opens up the soil to help the lawn drain better and allow air, water and organic matter to reach the roots. The core-aerator pulls out plugs of soil, opening up holes in your turf about a half-inch wide. You should leave the plugs on the lawn as they break down in a few days and nourish the underground life that supports the lawn's roots. You can rent a machine or hire someone to core-aerate.

Spread compost: A top layer of compost adds valuable organic matter to your lawn. The best time to apply is right after you core-aerate because the compost travels down into the holes. Use the compost from your own bin or purchase compost in bags. Scatter the compost about ¼" in depth and rake it gently so it falls between the grass blades.

Fertilize: Lawns in northern Illinois can survive without nitrogen, but will do better with some additional fertilizer. At MODE Landscape, we encourage you to use an organic fertilizer designed for lawns. Follow package instructions and feed once in September and again around Thanksgiving when the grass has stopped growing but the ground is not yet frozen. The nutrients will then be available for the lawn to access in early spring.

Seeding: If you need to rejuvenate your lawn, we recommend that you overseed. Seeding takes a little longer to fill in versus sod, but ultimately leads to a healthier, more resilient lawn because you can choose the appropriate seed variety for your sunny or shady location.

To overseed, start by weeding the area thoroughly (avoid using an herbicide right before seeding). Rake the lawn deeply so that the seeds are exposed to the soil. Lightly scatter ¼ - ½" of compost over the existing lawn, filling in low spots with top soil as needed. Use a spreader or scatter the seed by hand. Rake the seeded area gently to evenly distribute then add a top dressing of sifted compost, peat moss, or shredded coir to help retain the moisture after the area is watered.

At first water diligently as grass seed needs to be sufficiently moist for 14 days in order to germinate. Sprinkle water lightly once or twice a day; be gentle so that the seeds don't float away. Continue the daily sprinkle until the seeds have sprouted, then switch to watering deeply once a week or so depending on the rainfall. Keep watering until the ground freezes.

Lastly, let the grass grow tall so the blades can enjoy an abundance of sunlight and crowd out the weeds. Keep your mower setting high, at least 3 inches. Leave the clippings on the grass where they will break down and return nutrients to the soil. Once leaves begin to fall, shred them finely with your mower and leave them behind to feed the lawn as well. If there are too many leaves, shred them finely and then rake them into your garden beds where they will provide nutrients and winter protection for your shrubs and perennials.

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