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## Fall Management Leads to Healthy Turf All Year

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Fall is the most important time of year for turfgrass management. What you do with your lawn this fall will have an impact on next year's growth. The lush growth of spring is fueled mostly by sugars stored in roots the previous fall. As the weather gets warmer and average humidity decreases, grass growth slows down until it becomes dormant. Top growth has slowed down and sugars made by the chlorophyll in the leaves are stored in the roots instead of being used to make new leaves. The roots are instrumental for winter survival and for spring green up.

Proper fall fertilization is crucial. *Nitrogen (N)*, the first number in the N-P-K fertilizer analysis, is the most important element for turf growth. At that time, apply 5# of a fertilizer with 20-30% nitrogen. Most of our soils contain adequate phosphorous (P), the second number in the N-P-K formula. *Potassium*, the third number in a fertilizer analysis, is not normally needed for lawns in north Idaho.

*Weeds* are best controlled in September and October, because they draw herbicides into their root systems, more effectively killing the weed.

Fall is also a good time to manage *thatch* and *compaction*. Thatch is when living and dead grass roots and stems build up between the soil and green grass blades, and looks like a thick tangle of dark brown roots above the soil level. If thatch is greater than 1/2 inch, the lawn should be core aerated. In lawns with a thatch layer over 3/4 inch thick you should aerate. Core aeration also manages soil compaction in high traffic areas.

*Planting* is best done in the fall because grasses grow rapidly in the cool fall weather and have less competition from germinating weeds than in spring.

*Irrigation* should continue, applying half to one inch of water for each application, but gradually reducing irrigation frequency to once every week to ten days. If it rains half an inch, delay the next irrigation by three to five days. Irrigation (1/2 inch of water) should be provided at the time of fertilizer application to provide the greatest benefit to the lawn; ongoing fall watering will increase the beneficial effects of fall fertilization.

Moose Valley Farms will be conducting a class on Fall Turf Management as part of their Find Out Fridays series at 10 am Friday, September 19. RSVP 267-5108.

*Mike Bauer is the Horticulturist for Moose Valley Farms, a full-service garden center located in Naples at mile marker 495. Please feel free to call us at 267-5108 or stop in if you have any questions.*