



The Water Cronicles

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Spring Fever

By Chris Vasecka

With April approaching fast everyone is gearing up and waiting for another season of gardening and lawn maintenance. But why wait; there is plenty to do now. Careful planning done now will save you a lot of time and money this year. You have received several calendars from area businesses, now we can put one to use. Let's create an agronomic calendar. Now this can be as simple or complex as you would like, but it will become the basis of the cultural care of your lawn.

Let's begin with the basics. Fertilization. If you have a newly established lawn, you may be fertilizing once a month to help with new roots and density. If you have a well established lawn, you will probably fertilize 3 times a year maybe 4 if you do a winterized application. To simplify it, mark down your first application on Memorial Day, your second application on the 4th of July, and your third application on Labor Day. If you are raising the flag at home you should probably be spreading fertilizer. If you are planning a winterized application, you will need to wait until after your turf has hardened off, which would be around October 15th or later.

Next, let's tackle herbicides. You know as well as I do, all Dandelions are evil. And killing them is just as bad. Timing is crucial when dealing broadleaf plants (dandelions). If it is not right, you may have thrown a lot of money at your lawn with no result. First we need to understand the lifecycle of a dandelion. Dandelions are a bi-annual plant. The seeds are generated from the flowers in mid May to mid June. Those seed land on to a turf canopy and are shaped in such a way that when it rains the seed will work its way down to the soil level. They will then germinate in late June to mid July. At this time the turf is under a great amount of stress and begins to thin out. This gives the opportunity for sunlight to break through the canopy and allow the dandelion to survive. If the turf is strong enough the dandelion will germinate and die. For those that survive, they will grow into a small green low lying Florence, sometimes hard to see, because they are small and carry the same color as the turf. The new plants spend all of their time and energy storing food. As soon as the weather turns cool, the plant will go dormant so that it will not consume any of its saved food storage. Come next spring when the ground temperature maintains above 50 degrees these plants will become active again. No longer is food storage their concern but the production of flowers. First it will produce the yellow flower that we are used to seeing, when the flower is ready with new seeds, the plant will use all of its stored energy to shoot the stalk up as high as it can in order for the wind to grab the new seeds and disperse them. This is the end of the Bi-annual cycle. To try to kill them at this time would be kind of silly, yet so many of do the same thing, we see the dandelions, so we

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must kill the dandelions. Remember the seeds are finished with germination in July, and we still have a fertilization scheduled for September. Incorporate your broadleaf herbicide with your September Fertilizer. If you still feel like you need to attack your dandelions this spring, watch the soil temps and wait for them to hit 50 degrees, typically around May 15th or when the Lilacs bloom. Make sure to hit them this fall and you will have a much better kill rate.

Crabgrass is much simpler to deal with. Crabgrass is an annual grass, so all of it that you had seen last fall is dead now. Crabgrass won't germinate until the soil temps are at least 60 degrees (Late May Early June). We will use a pre-emergent herbicide for crabgrass. This herbicide is effective for up to 100 days. It can be applied any time between April 1st and May 15th, but no later. Once this window is passed the crabgrass has already begun germination and then it is extremely difficult to kill. We have a fertilization planned for the end of May. We can move that up to the beginning of May and use it in combination with our crabgrass treatment.

Power Raking, Dethatching, Grooming; whatever you would like to call it needs to be done at some point of the season. Most people do this process in the spring. I will have to challenge this. This process is meant to help remove thatch and promote infiltration of water and oxygen to the root zone. The problem with doing it immediately in the spring is that it promotes and opens up many opportunities for weeds to grow. I suggest that this be done at the beginning of August, or if you have a very thick lawn, do it also at the beginning of June. The weather should be nice and warm, with night time temps well into the 60's.

Mowing; to each their own. I will make only a few suggestions. Mow often enough that you are only taking off ¼ of the blade for each mowing. In June and Late August, this may mean more than one mowing a week. You can help this by not applying as much fertilizer in the spring application. Always use a sharp blade. Have an extra set of blades handy to change out in between mowing. Sharper blades mean less water, less fertilizer, less disease and less upright growth. In the spring and fall mow as needed, but don't mow more than what is needed at any time of the year.

Aerification. If you can fit this in your budget, you will want this done in early June. This will help your lawn through the long hot summer and will help your grass develop better roots.

That about sums up the summer, hopefully you have penciled in your favorite fishing trips and summer cabin trips. You have planned the work, now work the plan and you will be guaranteed to have the best lawn on the block.

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