

DEVELOP A FERTILIZATION PROGRAM



Your lawn beautifies and adds value to your home. It's the green space that provides recreational opportunities for your family. It reduces heat and improves air quality. While a well maintained, thick 10,000 square foot (929 square meter) lawn may look like a single carpet of green, there actually will be 6 turf plants per square inch (25.4 millimeters), 850 turf plants per square foot (30.45 square meters) for a total of 8.5 million turf plants. All those hard-working grass plants need a proper diet to keep functioning at their best.

The goal of a good fertility program is to produce a reasonable amount of top growth, but not at the expense of root growth or carbohydrate storage. A good root system is the key factor to a healthy lawn.

When developing a lawn fertilization program, understanding the basics of lawn fertilizers is the starting point. It is important to not only use the right mixture, but also to use the right quantity and apply it at the right time of the year.

Too much fertilizer, especially with high levels of soluble nitrogen, tends to increase thatch problems and can make a lawn more prone to insects and disease. Or, worse yet, you could literally burn your lawn. Using too little fertilizer can make your lawn more susceptible to diseases.

Lawns within each geographic or climatic region of the country are different, with different species of either warm-season or cool-season turfgrass. Each species of grass has its own "care and feeding" requirements. Fertilizer needs will vary according to those factors, so match these procedures to the specific needs of your lawn under your seasonal growing conditions.

Ideally, contact your professional regional turfgrass sod producer or your local county extension agent to find out

the procedures for conducting a soil test to determine your lawn's specific fertility needs. At the very least, ask the turfgrass specialist at your local garden center which fertilizer is best for each seasonal application.

For cool-season turfgrass, begin the fertilization program as the grass begins to grow in the spring and reduce applications as the weather gets hotter. When cooler weather returns in the fall, the lawn can again be fertilized. A late fall fertilizer application after the first frost, but before the ground freezes, can increase lawn quality the following spring. For cool-season turfgrass, it is usually best to concentrate a larger amount of nitrogen during the early fall growing period and a lesser amount in the spring.

Warm-season turfgrass flourishes during the warmer summer months. The fertilization program should start just after spring green-up and stop about two months before the average frost date in the fall. It is best to concentrate a larger amount of nitrogen during the early to late spring applications and a lesser amount in the fall.

The frequency of fertilizer applications depends primarily on the amount and form of nitrogen used. Fertilizer with quick-release nitrogen will require more frequent applications. Fertilizer with slow-release nitrogen can adequately feed the lawn longer, generally from 6 to 10 weeks. Most turf experts recommend that a lawn fertilizer have at least one-half of its nitrogen in a slow-release form.

With either form of nitrogen, if the lawn still looks good and is growing well, wait longer for the next application. Fertilizer application rates should be as low as possible to still produce a high quality lawn.

As with all fertilizer and control products, the label must be read, understood and followed explicitly. Consider the label as the "recipe" for the proper feeding of your lawn.



For more information on lawn care and helpful "How to" tips, visit The Lawn Institute at <http://www.TheLawnInstitute.org>.