

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR YARD THIS FALL

Get a soil test - For about \$20 or \$30, you can find out exactly what your lawn needs (and doesn't need). Why spend your money and time on something that may not be needed? Is your pH already high enough – why buy lime? Maybe you need nitrogen but your phosphorus level is high after years of accumulation. Find a fertilizer with no phosphorus. Know what your lawn needs, and you can be confident your money is being well-spent.

Seed any bare spots - Fall is the perfect time to reseed your yard. After all, that's when nature reseeds itself - have you noticed all the plants going to seed lately? The warm soil (above 50 degrees) and the cooler air create a perfect combination for seed germination. Mow the area low this one time a year (2-2.5 inches), and sweep up any debris so seeds make contact with the soil. Spread a thin, even layer of seed. If you decide to fertilize, use a starter fertilizer – specially made for immature plants so they won't be killed by harsher fertilizers. Water lightly and often to keep moist until the seeds germinate. Once sprouted, water deeply (1 inch) once a week, in the morning. This promotes strong, deep root growth. Shorter, more frequent waterings promote shallow roots and weaken the grass. The deeper roots will help the grass find water in the heat and draught of next summer.

Consider not using fertilizer on your yard - Nitrogen and phosphorus, two main components of fertilizer, are two of the largest pollutants in our waterways. Consider instead grass-cycling (leaving your cut grass on your yard) and mowing or shredding your leaves in place. It can save you time, money, and labor. No need to bag your grass clippings. No need to buy and spread fertilizer. The natural supplies of nitrogen and carbon will provide a large portion of the nutrients your lawn needs this fall, while preventing excess nutrient runoff.

Fertilize in the fall, not the spring - Most grasses are cool season grasses. They will respond better to fertilizer as the temperatures start to drop. If you do fertilize, fall fertilization (October and November) promotes stronger roots. Strong roots help grass grow better when summer droughts occur. Fertilization in the spring promotes blade growth, not root growth, actually creating a weaker plant overall. Adding fertilizer in the spring actually stresses the cool season grasses just as they are trying to hunker down for the heat of summer.

Use the right amount of fertilizer and keep it on your yard - Why pour your money literally down the drain? Follow application rates – less is more. Additional fertilizer does not get used by plants; the excess will simply wash away. Don't leave fertilizer on driveways, sidewalks, and roads. Broom it back into your yard and let your grass benefit from it. And only fertilize if heavy rains are not expected. Light rains will soak it in, heavy rains will wash it away.

Mow, Rake or Compost your leaves - If you don't have too many leaves in your yard, mow them in place with a mulching lawnmower for a free and easy fertilizer (see above). Too many leaves to mow? Rake and bag them. Raking your leaves is good for you and the environment. Get a free workout and prevent air pollution at the same time. The average gasoline-powered leaf blower generates as much emissions in one hour as a car does in a 350 mile drive. Once they're bagged, they will be picked up for composting if you have a Yard Waste Program sticker. Compost is available for sale at the City Yard Waste Facility at the intersection of County Rd. 2100N and 1900E. You could also compost them yourself. Leaves are a great addition to any compost pile.

Plant a tree - Fall is the best time to plant trees. It allows them to become established well before the stress of summer. Trees help absorb and filter stormwater, protect against erosion, and take up carbon dioxide from the air. Not to mention their aesthetic appeal! Choose native species – they're easier to maintain and provide a much larger benefit to wildlife.

This information brought to you by the City of Danville Engineering & Urban Services Department.

*For a wide variety of yard and garden advice, visit the University of Illinois Extension Horticulture page:
<http://web.extension.illinois.edu/state/horticulture/index.php>*