

Can your lawn put up a good fight?

1. Food, food, food

A well-nourished lawn will be thick, full, and healthy, and will suffer less damage from higher insect populations. The grass plants will be better able to resist weed infestation, withstand hot summer drought conditions, wear and tear, and winter stresses.

Apply a lawn fertilizer three to four times a year: early spring (as soon as snow melts), late spring (late May/early June), mid summer (July) and early fall (early September). Follow the recommended rate on the product bag. These rates are set low to provide the nutrients needed on a four-application per year cycle. Slow release nitrogen (from either organic or synthetic sources) improves the efficacy of fertilizers.

2. Water

Get an inexpensive rain gauge, and empty it after every rainfall. Keep a mental note of the weekly total accumulation. A lawn will normally require an inch of water per week. Supplement rainfall only if needed. The morning is the best time to water. Infrequent deep watering is better than frequent shallow watering. Keep in mind, that open, sunny areas require more irrigation. Sprinklers are better than hand watering, as you get more even distribution of the water.

3. Mowing

Keep grass blades longer (5-6 cm) so the plant leaves can hold more water and are better able to choke out weed seeds. Avoid cutting off more than 1/3 of grass blade at each cutting, especially in the heat of the summer. If you cut more, you expose the tender crowns to sudden heat and sun exposure, and the grass plants will sunburn.

Keep mowing blades sharp. A dull blade will shred off the tops instead of a

clean cut, making the lawn look brown at the tips. Try to mow when the grass is dry, to keep clippings from "clumping". Clumps left on the lawn can prevent proper re-growth. Unless excessive, leave the clippings on the lawn to return the nutrients and organic matter.

4. Weed Control

A healthy, dense lawn will keep new weed seeds from germinating. The key is to start with a weed-free lawn, and then keep it weed free by feeding it well from that point on. Spot spray or hand pull if a weed appears.

Crabgrass: If crabgrass was a visible problem last summer, substitute the first application in early spring with a lawn fertilizer and crabgrass control.

Broadleaf weeds: Hand pulling or spot weeding can control isolated weed growth. If broadleaf weeds such as dandelions, knotweed and plantain are actively growing in large numbers, substitute the late spring feeding with a lawn fertilizer and weed control, or spray the weeds directly. If you can maintain control of the weeds over the summer, you should be able to return to a regular feeding program the next year.

5. Insect control

Insect problems are often difficult to detect and hard to control once discovered. Repair insect-damaged lawns with clean weed-free topsoil and insect resistant grass seeds. Look for grass seed mixes that have a high percentage of perennial turf type ryegrass and fescues. These often carry a type of beneficial fungus, called endophyte, which insects find repulsive. The best times to repair seed are in the early spring, and/or the early fall.

—Ontario Agri Business Association




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