Lush, healthy lawn keeps things cool on hot days

Let's Get Growing

Marjorie Mason Hogue

Everyone enjoys the first spring lawn raking - it's the sign that winter is finally over.

The green of grass in May is a thing of beauty and the glorious fragrance of the first cutting is true aromatherapy (the first clippings are also a catalyst for the compost heap).

Grass is a cool weather crop not well-suited for summer's heat, drought and insect invasion. Thousands of tiny grass plants crowded closely together need regular care - fertilizing and watering to maintain their spring beauty. Thus, a great controversy has arisen over lawns.

Some have removed lawns entirely and planted other ground covers - others have simply allowed weed patches to develop thereby giving natural gardening a bad name.

Some continue to overdose their lawns on "high nitrogen" fertilizers that produce lush tender grass attracting hoards of insects which require chemical treatment.

I would like to make a few "middle of the road" suggestions for lawn care - whether you are a do-it-yourselfer or work with a lawncare company (many have developed "organic" methods as well as the traditional ones).

A lawn is a good thing - it removes toxins from the air, supplies oxygen, absorbs rainfall preventing run-off and effectively cools the air and lowers the temperature on hot days. Most important is the fact that it feels good when you walk on it with bare feet!

The Turgrass Resource Centre is promoting these ideas for sensible lawn care - specifically in the area of preparing your lawn for summer's heat.

Reduce fertilizer

Reduce or eliminate fertilizer and weed control applications at least 30 days before temperatures hit summer highs (last year that was in mid-June).

Careful mowing

Gradually raise the cutting height of your mower by 25 to 50 per cent as temperatures increase. Longer grass encourages deeper roots and shades the soil better.

Cut often

Mow as often as necessary so you never remove more than one third of the grass blade at a time. Make sure your mower is sharp for a clean rather than jagged cut.

Water regularly

Lawns need about one inch of water a week. If rains do not supply this, you should irrigate in the evening or early morning. Measure the amount by sinking a can into the lawn and marking the one inch depth.

Take care during drought

If severe water restrictions are enforced you may want to reserve your rations for vegetable gardens or trees. A healthy lawn will simply go dormant and turn a golden brown. It will become green again with the return of cooler weather and moisture. In a water crisis never lightly sprinkle your lawn - this will cause shallow roots which could be baked by the heat.

End of summer tip

As summer's heat subsides you can resume watering if necessary at weekly intervals and gradually lower the mowing height.

Fall maintenance

Early fall is the best time to carry out tasks such as aerating, dethatching and weed control. Then apply a balanced, slow-release fertilizer which will strengthen your lawn for winter and the following season.

Awkward areas

One further suggestion - if your lawn is a shape that is not easily maintained - having steep slopes or narrow strips - consider making maintenance easier by removing awkward grass areas.

Send your questions or comments to:

Let's Get Growing
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Uxbridge, ON L9P 1R4
Attn: Marjorie Mason Hogue.

Scholarship offered for students

YOUTH

The Harmony Movement is creating an important new scholarship program for high school students who contribute to eliminating social barriers and discrimination.

Twenty scholarships will be awarded annually to recognize significant contributions by high school graduates towards eliminating social barriers to mutual understanding.

The Harmony Movement is a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to promoting intercultural understanding and a harmonious environment for everyone in Canada.

Announcing the award program, Connie Sam, executive director of the Harmony Movement said, "There are young people making an incredible contribution to promoting mutual respect and good will among various cultural and religious groups. It's time they get the recognition they deserve."

Sam continued, "The scholarships will more than recognize and award young people. They will encourage youth to promote harmony in their own schools and communities."

Any full-time student graduating from high school in the Greater Toronto Area who is under the age of 21 and entering a post-secondary institution may apply.

June 30 is the deadline for this year's applications.

Applications can be obtained from the Harmony movement by writing 70 Gibson Drive, Unit 12, Markham, Ontario, L3R 4C2, or by phoning (905) 940-2823, faxing (905) 940-1521, or by sending an e-mail to harmony@ipoline.com.

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