

On the Grow

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Fall Tips for Lawncare

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For more information regarding articles and advertising
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Iowa Turfgrass Update

Jeff Wendel, CGCS, Iowa Turfgrass Institute

A little bit about A Lot of Things

I admit I stole the title from Donald Kaul; he used it often in his, 'Over the Coffee' columns in the Register. Most of you will not remember that, but the title fits.

Iowa Turfgrass Water Quality and Conservation Committee

This committee formed to protect, conserve and improve water resources in Iowa. The scope of this group is broad, with projects aimed at establishing Best Management Practices for each facility, conducting research that will give empirical data regarding nitrogen and phosphorus applied to turfgrass and educate Iowans on the benefit of turfgrass and its relationship with water quality.

The current plan is to launch the BMP effort at the 2015 Iowa Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show, stay tuned, your time and effort will be required for project success. Dealing with BMP's for home lawns is a daunting task, but an very important component of proper water use and conservation.

Iowa Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show

The 2015 Conference & Show is moving to The Meadows Conference Center in Altoona. Free parking, free internet, fabulous new hotel rooms and many entertainment/networking options. The 2015 Turfgrass Industry Reception will be in the Trade Show area, providing extended Trade Show hours and plenty of food, refreshments and networking.

The IPLCA Annual Meeting is Thursday, January 22nd at 10:45 AM.

The conference program and registration information will mail in early November, but the Hotel Room block is available now. Visit: <http://iowaturfgrass.org/iticonference2015hotelinformation.htm> or call 515-957-3000. When reserving your room please use Group Code: 01272014TUR. The Meadows Hotel will be full by early January. Other rooming options are the Adventureland Inn and Holiday Inn Express. There are also other hotels very close.

Turfgrass Crash Course

A new course for your staff needing training in turfgrass identification, weed management, soils, etc. will be offered on Tuesday, January 20th at the Iowa Turfgrass Conference. Lawn Care Operators who are 2 or 3 day Conference registrants can enroll their employees for this course for only \$50, lunch included.

IPLCA Awards

The Iowa Professional Lawn Care Association is accepting nominations for the 2014 'Lawn Professional of the Year' The form is available at: <http://www.iowaturfgrass.org/pdfformat/iplcaawardform.pdf>

There are many deserving individuals in the Lawn Care Industry, nominate your favorite and help shine a positive light on our Industry and its Professionals.

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Fall Tips to Ensure a Healthy Green Yard in the Spring

Ryan Adams, Iowa State University

As the leaves change and colors of fall become more beautiful, it is also the ideal season to complete turfgrass maintenance practices. It is the most important time to focus on cultural practices of mowing, aeration, fertilization, and seeding. The work you do now helps your lawn recover from summer stresses and prepares it for another long Iowa winter. This article will provide the necessary steps to ensure a healthy lawn through the fall months and next spring.

Mowing

Mowing is the most time consuming maintenance practice, but many aspects of mowing are misunderstood and performed incorrectly. Proper mowing practices play a vital role in helping to maintain a healthy, sustainable home lawn. Because lawns often look attractive after mowing it is easy to assume that grass thrives on mowing. In reality, mowing is a very destructive process that injures the grass plant. Each mowing temporarily stops root growth, decreases carbohydrates, increases water loss, decreases water absorption by the roots, and creates entry points and susceptibility to diseases. Therefore, it is important to minimize these stresses with sound and consistent mowing practices.

In general, taller mowing heights result in healthier grass that is better able to resist drought as well as possible harm from weeds, insects, and diseases. The “correct” height depends on the grass species and environmental conditions.

Kentucky bluegrass and the fine leaf fescues can be mowed slightly shorter compared to perennial ryegrass and tall fescue. Mowing below these recommended heights can result in a rapid decline in lawn quality.

Mowing height should be increased temporarily during stressful high-temperature periods. Raising the mowing height results in a deeper root system and helps the plant find necessary water and nutrients. The additional leaf tissue also allows the grass plant to produce more energy, that helps plants better withstand stressful periods. However, mowing well above the recommended heights can lead to a thin, spindly lawn where the grass plants lay over on themselves (matting). This condition can result in increased disease development.

Recommended Mowing Heights

| Species | Cool | High-temperature |
|--------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| | weather | stress periods |
| | Mowing height (inches) | |
| Kentucky bluegrass | 2.00-2.50 | 2.50-3.00 |
| Perennial ryegrass | 2.00-2.50 | 2.50-3.00 |
| Fine leaf fescues | 1.50-2.00 | 2.00-2.50 |
| Tall fescue | 2.00-2.50 | 2.50-3.00 |

*In lawns where species are mixed, use the higher of the two recommendations

The decision whether to mow should be based on the growth of the grass, not by a set weekly schedule. The grass species, time of year, and rainfall are all influencing factors of rate of growth. You will notice that during the spring, your lawn will grow at a much faster rate and require more frequent mowing. As fall approaches, the tissue growth slows and more plant resources are focused towards the root system.

As a general rule, mow as often as needed so that no more than one-third of the total leaf area is removed in a single mowing. For example, a lawn maintained at 3 inches should be mowed before it reaches 4.5 inches. Removing more than one-third of the total leaf area can result in scalping and is detrimental to plant health. Shorter lawns require more frequent mowing.

Weed Control

Perennial broadleaf weeds can be controlled with an application of a broadleaf herbicide in the fall (late September to early November in Iowa). In the fall, perennial broadleaf weeds are transporting carbohydrates from their foliage to their roots in preparation for winter. Broadleaf herbicides applied in fall will be absorbed by the broadleaf weed’s foliage and transported to the roots along with the carbohydrates, resulting in the destruction of broadleaf weeds. The most effective broadleaf herbicide products contain a mixture of 2 or 3 herbicides as no single compound will control all broadleaf weeds. The most common broadleaf herbicides are 2,4-D, dicamba, triclopyr, MCPP (mecoprop), and quinclorac.

It is important to remember that some broadleaf herbi-



cides may affect new seedlings. To avoid damage, wait to apply herbicide until new seedlings have been mowed two or three times.

Thatch and Aerification

Thatch is an intermingled layer of living and dead plant material that accumulates above the soil surface. It bears a resemblance to a spongy peat moss layer. Thatch can be beneficial and problematic. Thatch supplies necessary food sources for microbes and organic matter. However, excessive thatch can harbor diseases and insects. Thatch that is properly balanced promotes growth and appearance of a well-groomed lawn. Proper balance of thatch requires a combination of management practices. These include preventing thatch buildup by reducing plant growth by only adding necessary nitrogen fertilization and the mechanical removal of thatch when necessary. It is important to remember that tall fescue, fine fescue and perennial ryegrass are other lawn species used in Iowa that seldom develop thatch problems.

A core aerator punches hollow tines into the soil and removes small soil cores about the size of your index finger. Core aerating should not be looked upon as a method of removing large amounts of thatch. Rather, it is most effective as a means of preventing thatch from developing and reducing soil compaction. Homeowners who have lawns receiving high maintenance should have annual core aerating.

A vertical mower is the most common machine to physically remove excess thatch that has accumulated over time. The vertical mower has evenly spaced knife-like blades that rotate perpendicularly to the thatch surface. The vertical mower blades slice through the thatch and about 1/4 inch into the soil surface. It is important to set the machine low enough so that some soil is deposited on the surface. After vertical mowing, hand rake the loose thatch from the surface and leave the soil. In addition to dethatching, a vertical mower can be used when renovating and preparing the surface for overseeding. A power rake is another type of machine used to remove thatch. It is different from a vertical mower because it has spring steel tines that loosen thatch without cutting into the soil. Vertical mowing and power raking are effective means of removing thatch; however, the slicing and ripping action during dethatching causes considerable stress on the lawn. For cool season grasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, early fall dethatching is most desirable.

Aeration, vertical mowing, and power raking services are available from some professional lawn care companies and the machines are usually available at rental companies.

Seeding

The best time to seed a lawn in Iowa is between mid-August and mid/late September. However, lawns can be successfully established as late as late-September in central Iowa and early October in southern Iowa. Late summer planting is preferred to spring seeding because seeds germinate and grow rapidly in the warm soil. The warm days and cool nights are ideal for seedling growth.

Fertilization is very important at the time of seeding. This is the only time you will be able to incorporate required soil amendments or fertilizer into the root zone.

Fall Tips Continued...

Prior to preparing the seedbed, broadcast fertilizer according to soil test recommendations, then incorporate to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Soil testing information can be found at www.extension.iastate.edu/publications/ST11.pdf.

Select high quality seed of the grass species best adapted to the site. Perennial ryegrasses may be included in seed mixtures for spring plantings to help the lawn establish quickly. However, for late summer planting, a mixture of three or four Kentucky bluegrass varieties is preferred in areas that receive full sun. Fine fescue is the most shade-tolerant grass recommended for Iowa lawns. Fine fescue that will not grow in your shade situation should be replaced with shrubs, ground covers, or mulches that are suitable for low light conditions.

Divide the total seed quantity in half. Using a drop-seeder, sow one half in one direction and the other half at right angles to the first. After the starter fertilizer and seed have been broadcast, lightly rake the area to cover the seed to a depth of no greater than 0.25 to 0.5 inches. Seeding depth varies based upon seed size. The

larger the seed size, the deeper it can be covered with soil. Roll the area lightly to firm the soil around the seed.

Grass seedlings are very susceptible to desiccation and the surface of a newly seeded lawn should not be allowed to dry. Water should be applied only in amounts necessary to keep the soil surface moist. Avoid overwatering and runoff. Two light applications of water per day will usually be sufficient unless it is hot and windy. In more extreme conditions, up to four light waterings per day may be necessary.

When irrigation is not available, mulching the lawn with clean (weed free) straw will help conserve moisture and prevent erosion. One to 1.5 bales of straw per 1,000 square feet will give a light mulch covering that will not have to be removed after germination. There are also other mulching materials available for lawn establishment. These include pelletized newspaper and excelsior (wood shavings) mats.



Fall Tips Continued...

Fertilization

The number of applications depends on the desires/expectations of the homeowner, soil type, cultural practices, and other factors. A single application of fertilizer in late October/early November containing 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet may be sufficient for low maintenance lawns. Highly maintained lawns may need additional fertilizer in the spring (0.5 – 0.75lb./N per 1,000), September (0.75 – 1 lb. /N per 1,000), and a late October/early November (0.75 – 1 lb. /N per 1,000).

For additional information on any of these topics, refer to the following publications:

- * Weed Control in Home Lawns (PM 930)
- * Lawn Fertilization (PM 1057)
- * Turfgrass Management Calendar: Kentucky Bluegrass Lawns (PM 1063)
- * Establishing a Lawn from Seed (PM 1072)
- * Understanding Thatch in the Home Lawn (PM 1755)
- * Which grass is best for your Iowa Lawn (PM 1067)
- “Coming Soon”



Job Posting: Lawn Care Technician

Struyk Turf LTD of Council Bluff, IA is in search of a college level applicator/spray technician to join our team. This position involves applying fertilizer and pesticide to residential and commercial lawns, diagnosing and treating lawn problems, responding to customer needs and many other tasks as assigned, all in a timely and efficient manner. The ideal candidate will possess a two or four year degree in Turfgrass Management or a related field. Turf Industry experience is also desired.

Struyk Turf offers an independent work environment, advancement opportunities and very competitive wages. To apply, please send resume to struykturf@gmail.com or apply in person at 1628 9th Avenue, Council Bluffs, IA. Struyk Turf is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

NEW PRODUCT INGREDIENT DIRECTORY



The Office of Pesticide Programs newest directory is titled “Ingredients Used in Pesticide Products” and contains valuable information on pesticide product chemicals, both active and inert ingredients. The target audiences for the resource directory include consumers, press and registrants. The directory explains the different types of pesticides and ingredients. It currently contains fact sheets on the most commonly searched-for active ingredients and pesticide groups, and more will be added over time.

<http://www2.epa.gov/ingredients-used-pesticide-products>

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Are You Giving Your Customers What They Really Want?

Tom Borg, Tom Borg Consulting

There was a study about customer satisfaction that was conducted by a research group. The results were so startling that it quickly became obvious that the outcome could apply to all types and sizes of businesses and organizations, including the green industry. The study centered on what customers really want to know about the people from whom they are buying. Among other things, the research revealed that the customers want to know the answers to four questions about the person serving them:

1. Do you like me?

2. Do you care about me?

3. Can I trust you?

4. Do you know what you're talking about?

Let's take a look and see how this would apply to your green industry company.

The **first** thing your customers want to know is if the employee or manager that they encounter is sincere. Does your representative use their name, does he really listen, and have a sincere understanding in his voice?

Let's face it. Being in business is not really about you or your team, as much as it is all about the customer you're trying to serve. As the late Peter Drucker taught us, the purpose of any company for being in business is to find and keep customers. And since it is the customer who ultimately signs our paycheck, it would be extremely important to create an atmosphere where your customers feel they are liked and appreciated. If your customers do not get the impression that they are respected and genuinely liked by you and your employees, it will be hard to keep them.

The **second** question customers want to know the answer to is, did the representative sincerely care about them? It has been said that "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Your customer will get a pretty good idea whether or not they are liked from the type of questions they are asked by your managers or employees. The tone of voice, body language, the little things they say or do,

and how helpful they try to be in solving the customers' problems, all indicate if and how much they do care about the person they are serving.

A good example of this is one of my clients, Tuff Turf Molebusters, located near Grand Rapids, Michigan.

This green business makes it a point to train their technicians to sincerely listen to their customers whether they are on the phone or onsite servicing the account. Even when the customer just wants to discuss the weather or some other trivia, the technician purposely spends a few extra minutes to just simply listen to the person.

When people really know that you care about them, they are much more forgiving when an error is made. It is like a scale. An analogy I like to use in my consulting or seminars is that it's like when you weigh beans. More beans on one side of the scale will tip it in that direction. In your business, the beans are the little things you and your team do, to show the customer that you like and care about them. So when there are a lot of extra beans on the right side of the scale, you have the advantage in keeping your customers satisfied.

The third question customers want answered is, can they trust the representative? Indications of trust can be seen in how confident your team member is and if he follows through as promised. Here's one example of how trust can be lost; it happened to our family. A wellknown lawn fertilization company that was servicing us violated our trust by misdiagnosing a problem we were having with some vegetation in a section of our yard. As a result, I made a decision that we no longer needed the services of this company.

It was easy to make that decision, because I no longer believed the technician servicing our property had our best interest at heart. I got the impression that he was trying to sell us something I did not need or want, once discovered, I regretted the purchase. They are wary of misleading advice that can cost them unnecessary expense and embarrassment.

Once your customers begin to doubt your employee's

Customers Continued...

ability to tell the truth, you are in great danger of losing that person's trust forever. We call that the final five yards. It does not matter how well everyone else in your company performs. When that frontline employee, who is interacting with that customer, fails, the entire company is judged. Many times this judgement will end to a loss of confidence, followed by the customer going to one of your competitors for service or products.

Finally, the fourth thing people who buy from you want to know is if the person servicing them is knowledgeable and competent.

Some years ago, when we had a new home built, we hired a company to install our irrigation system. The installation technicians showed up before the underground utilities had been flagged. Since we were not home to stop them, they proceeded to install the sprinkler system and cut our telephone line in two places, rendering our phone system useless. They installed the sprinkler system, but in their haste to do so, created an enormous amount of annoyance and aggravation for my wife and I. In our eyes, these technicians had crossed the line of incompetence.

When your personnel can consistently demonstrate that they are knowledgeable and competent, it will build confidence in your customers. When your team is able to solve problems and successfully exceed the expectations of the people they are serving, only good things can happen. The customer will come to expect and rely on you and your team's professionalism and experience. When your customers believe in your company, repeat business and referrals are almost always certain.

Of course, in order for these four questions to be answered, your team needs to be trained properly. The responsibility for whether or not they are trained ultimately rests with the owner and management. Proper employee selection, and a consistent commitment to implementing the training processes, will ensure your long-term success.

So, in summary, to build lifetime customer satisfaction, make sure your company is able to provide the kind of customer-service training that will help your employees answer these four questions on a regular basis, with all of the customers they serve. When you are able to do

that, you will be separating your business from the sea of mediocrity of green industry companies that you are competing with.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Tom Borg is a business expert who works with small and mid-sized green industry companies to profitably gain and retain customers through the use of his consulting, speaking, videos and professional writing. To ask him a question or to consult with Tom, contact him at: 734-404-5909 or email him at: tom@tomborg.com or visit his website at: www.tomborgconsulting.com.

This article first appeared in the September Issue of Irrigation & Green Industry Magazine.

Attention Students!

The Iowa Turfgrass Institute Scholarship Application for 2014 is now available!

Deadline: Must be received in the Turfgrass Office no later than October 31, 2014.

To download the application visit:
<http://www.iowaturfgrass.org/itischolarship.html>



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Serve on the IPLCA Board!

Southwest Director, Southeast Director, At-Large Director and North Central Director seats are up for election. Applications are due by November 10, 2014. The election is held at the IPLCA Annual Meeting during the 2015 Iowa Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show. For more information please contact Sarah at sarah@iowaturfgrass.org

Please provide us with a short biography to be used in the December 2014 issue of the IPLCA newsletter. **Please e-mail the biography along with a picture to Sarah Hodgson no later than November 10, 2014. Send to: sarah@iowaturfgrass.org**

Send pictures to: Iowa Turfgrass Office
1605 N Ankeny Blvd Suite 210
Ankeny, IA 50023

Name: _____

Company: _____

_____ Years at current job position
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Running for which board position: _____

Employment History (start from current job, and go backwards)
List dates, name of company and your title

Personal Information/Family/Hobbies:

Education: (Only necessary to list highest degree, but if you'd like to list more, you may.)

Goals as a Board Member: (maximum number of words: 75 please)