

# RALPH'S LAWN CARE BASICS

Revised 2009 (v7)

Do you sometimes look at your home lawn and wonder how to help it look better? If you like to do it yourself or if you want to evaluate lawn services, these tips are for you! Our business is Butler's Golf Course, in Elizabeth Township, PA. We compiled these free tips after talking to hundreds of customers over the years about their lawns. Please note that all tasks listed are optional (there is no need to try to eradicate weeds if they don't bother you), and we can never guarantee a "perfect" lawn (golf courses aren't perfect, either). If you have a question, please call Ralph Nill, Christy Barowich or Jake Nill at 412.751.4222. This information is based on Western Pennsylvania's conditions, so if you live elsewhere, you might check with a local expert (golf superintendent, equipment supplier, county agent, university, etc.). *Enjoy!*

Free copies of these tips are available in Butler's Golf Shop and on our website, [www.ButlersGolf.com](http://www.ButlersGolf.com).

The top three considerations for maintaining a good quality home lawn are:

- 1) **Fertilizer.** Apply ONLY in the fall (*never* in the spring – see page 2).
- 2) **Crabgrass** (see p. 6)
- 3) **Grub damage** (see p. 6)

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## RESOURCES

- ♦ **Measure First:** Measure your lawn's square footage. If your lot is 150 feet across and 200 feet deep, that's 30,000 square feet (ft<sup>2</sup>). If your house is 40 ft by 50 ft, subtract 2,000 ft<sup>2</sup>. A rule of thumb is that a normal pace is about 2.5 feet (imagine taking a brisk walk). There are 43,560 ft<sup>2</sup> in an acre. A store can help you compute the amount of product needed if you can tell them the square footage.
- ♦ **E.H. GRIFFITH** is *the* place I would suggest for purchasing fertilizer, seed, chemicals, and equipment. Griffith's is located on Palmer Street in Swissvale. **(412) 271-3365**. [www.ehgriffith.com](http://www.ehgriffith.com). We have been making most of our purchases at "Griff" for the last 40 years. We have always found the Guerin family and their staff to be honest, reliable, and knowledgeable in all matters regarding turf care. They sell mainly to golf courses and landscapers but also welcome retail customers, and their prices are excellent. They sell larger containers of chemicals, but the cost per ounce is MUCH lower than tiny bottles and packages sold in big box stores. Their chemicals are usually more concentrated so they go a lot farther. You can store most chemicals for several years and they don't go bad (some don't deal well with being frozen, so if your storage is unheated, be sure to ask Griffith if anything you're buying would be affected). Another solution is to give leftover weed killer to your up-wind neighbor to keep their weed seeds from blowing into your yard.
- ♦ Always use a **spinner spreader** to spread *granular* products. Drop spreaders aren't as good because it's difficult to get even distribution with them, and this causes streaks and burn marks.
- ♦ If you intend to *spray* liquid chemicals, a **backpack sprayer** with a hand pump lever on the side will save time and effort. A two-gallon sprayer with a hand pump that screws into the top center of the sprayer works fine also. You just measure the chemical and water in the tank, as specified on the product label, then spray as evenly as possible.
- ♦ **Read the labels!** Always use application rates recommended on product labels -- they are the optimum rates. Never over-apply: this is expensive

and harmful to the environment and can even damage or kill your lawn. Follow labels for instructions about protective clothing and handling precautions. The label also details what to do if you have an accident. Read it first.

◆ **Penn State Cooperative Extension Agents**

◆ Allegheny County: 412.473-2540

◆ Westmoreland County: 724.837.1402

They can answer questions about trees, shrubs, flowers, lawns and vegetable gardens, and they sell soil testing kits. One test is for pH levels, and it tells you if you need lime to neutralize soil acidity (which is common in western PA). You can also test to see what nutrients are low (fertilizers have different nutrient levels). A Penn State University soil testing kit costs \$9 if you pick it up at an Extension office or \$12 for mail order. Penn State does the testing and mails a report to you. Penn State's Ag College prints pamphlets, such as "Choosing a Qualified...Lawn Care Company". See [www.cas.psu.edu](http://www.cas.psu.edu).

- Another result of spring fertilization is excess top growth. This leads to more mowing, too many clippings when mowing, and rapid thatch accumulation.
- Spring rains bring natural nitrogen to green up the lawn. So, there is NO need to apply fertilizer to a home lawn in the spring.
- Fertilizer companies advertise heavily in spring because that is when they can easily sell fertilizer. People are excited about their lawn greening up after winter. In the fall, people are tired of mowing, *but fall is the correct time to fertilize*. If you want to bale hay for your livestock, then definitely fertilize heavily in spring like the farmers do.

**Product (3 choices – remember, fertilize ONLY in the fall):**

**A) Plain fertilizer**

- TurfCare fertilizer -- available at E.H. Griffith.
- The most economical is TurfCare 16-20-6 [it's 16% Nitrogen, 20% Phosphorus and 6% Potassium].
- The best grade is **TurfCare 21-5-19** [it's slow release and does not burn [it's 21 % Nitrogen (N), 5% Phosphorus (P), and 19% Potassium (K)]. This has three times the potassium, which is valuable for growing a stronger grass plant and improving winter hardiness. Naturally, the cost per bag is higher.

**B) Combined granular weed killer + fertilizer**

- The **19-0-7 Lebanon** brand combines fertilizer with the broad spectrum weed killer **Confront**.
- If using this, apply early in the morning so the weed killer can stick to the dew on the weed leaves (which is acting by contact). Confront can also be absorbed by the plant roots (which is called systemic action).
- Don't get weed-and-feed products on shrubs or flowers (the weed killer will damage or kill them), and don't use in the spring.

**Tool?** Use a spinner spreader.

**Amount?** Use recommended rate on bag. One bag of TurfCare covers 12,000 square feet.

**Pattern?** To get good coverage and avoid burning, use half rate and go over the lawn twice -- each time in a different direction (perpendicular).

**Water/rain?**

- **Plain fertilizer:** It doesn't matter if grass is wet or dry for plain fertilizer. You don't have to water it in, and it does not matter if it rains or there is dew.

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## LEAF CONTROL

Fall

**What to do?** One great way to get rid of leaves is to use a mulching **mower** to grind and pulverize your leaves and grass clippings. Mulched leaves make great fertilizer. Mulching beats raking and bagging!

**Tool?** If you don't have a mulching mower, try blocking off the grass discharge chute on your conventional mower if you want to mulch leaves. It is very important to start mulching when the leaves begin to fall, as there will probably be more leaves than your mower can handle all at once. It might take four or five mulchings, but you would need to mow a couple of times, anyway.

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## FERTILIZER

Fall

**When?** Fertilize only one time a year -- in September.

(You can apply anything else the same day as you fertilize -- seed, lime, or weed killer. But, wait two weeks to seed after using weed killer.)

**Why?**

- In the fall, fertilizer stimulates root growth so the plant is stronger all through the next year.
- If you fertilize in spring, one result is shrunken roots. The plant is then actually weaker and less capable of surviving summer's stresses (drought, weed competition, insects, diseases).

(...Fertilizer continued)

- **Fertilizer + weed killer combination:** Do *not* water in and don't apply if rain is predicted within 24 hours. The weed killer type needs to be applied early in the morning when there is dew so that the product sticks to the dewy leaf of the weeds, which will allow the weed killer to be absorbed into the leaf of the weed plant.

**Lawn only?** Plain fertilizer can be used around flowers, shrubs, and trees. However, do not apply *weed-and-feed* fertilizers to your flowers, trees, or shrubs.

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## EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE

Fall

- Be sure to immediately rinse out your fertilizer/pesticide spreader after each use.
- Immediately rinse out sprayers after each use.
- At the end of the season, wash off that mower. Drain out any remaining gas and then run engine until it quits to drain the carburetor at season's end. Sharp mower blades give a cleaner cut.

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## WEED CONTROL

Spring or Fall

### When and why?

- It is fine to apply weed killers in fall while grass and weeds are still actively growing (before dormancy). It's also good to apply them in spring after the lawn starts growing again. It's NOT good in late summer because weeds are somewhat dormant and are harder to kill.
- You should wait two weeks after applying weed killer *before seeding*.
- **In spring, don't** use a *combination* granular weed killer+*fertilizer* product – make sure it's ONLY weed killer, whether it's granular or liquid spray.
- **In fall**, you can use any of the three: granular with *or* without fertilizer, or liquid spray.

### Product (there are choices):

- A) I prefer **Millenium liquid spray** weed killer for spraying -- available at E.H. Griffith. It controls most lawn weeds (including common ones like clover, ground ivy, chickweed, plantain, and dandelion). It will not kill good grass when you apply it at the proper rate. Millennium or other broad-spectrum weed killers will **NOT** kill crabgrass (*See crabgrass section*). Be sure to read the label for proper mixing of the weed killer with water for spraying. Spray when grass is dry and no

rain is predicted for 24 hours. Don't let the price per gallon scare you. It will keep for years, and you can give some to friends, neighbors, and relatives. If you get your neighbors to control their weeds, less weed seeds will blow into your yard!

- B) An alternative for **FALL ONLY** is **granular** weed killer *combined with fertilizer*. The **19-0-7 Lebanon** brand fertilizer contains the weed killer **Confront**. If using this, apply early in the morning so the weed killer can stick to the dew on the weed leaves (which is acting by contact). Confront can also be absorbed by the plant roots (which is called systemic action). Rain should not be in the forecast for the next 24 hours.

- C) An alternative for **SPRING** is the **TurfLine granular** weed killer (does **NOT** contain fertilizer). One 10 lb. bag covers 5,000 ft<sup>2</sup>. It works by contact only, using 2-4D, so it **MUST** be applied in **early morning** when the granules will stick to the leaves of the weeds. Rain should not be in the forecast for the next 24 hours.
- Personally, I feel that granular weed killers are slightly less effective than spray applications, but the advantage of granular products is that they are very easy and quick to apply. To be effective, granulars need to be applied early in the morning when there is dew so that the product sticks to the dewy blades of the weeds and can be absorbed into the leaves of the weeds.

**Tool?** Use a hand sprayer for liquid weed killers, or a spinner spreader for granular products.

**Amount?** Based on square footage of your lawn. For spray applications, follow the label instructions for the proper chemical + water mix. For granular application, also closely follow label instructions.

### Water/rain?

- If using a LIQUID type weed killer, spray when grass and weeds are dry. Do not water in or use if rain is forecast within 24 hours.
- If using GRANULAR type, spread in the EARLY morning while there is dew, so granules stick to weed leaves.
- **NO RAIN OR WATERING FOR 24-48 HOURS** after applying for either sprayable or granular weed killer or otherwise weed killer will be washed off and will do very little good.

**Lawn only?** Yes! Keep weed killer off of shrubs and flowers and away from trees.

**Follow-up?** Be sure to clean the sprayer. When weeds die and leave bare spots (after at least one week), be sure to fill them in with seed and some fertilizer. You can skip the fertilizer in the spring.

## SEEDING

Spring or Fall

### When?

- Both fall & spring are excellent for spreading seed.
- Wait to seed at least two weeks after applying a weed killer like Millenium. It's OK to fertilize and lime on the same day that you seed.
- If you put on or intend to make an application of pre-emergence crabgrass killer in the spring, do not seed until September, since the pre-emergent prevents ALL seeds, including grass seeds, from germinating in the spring or summer following application.

**Why?** The goal is to convert your existing lawn to a superior mix of grasses that are drought and disease resistant. You probably will have to overseed more than one year to get good results.

**Product?** Use E.H.Griffith "A" mix seed. It's an overseed mixture of three excellent hybrid ryegrasses, Penlawn fescue, and Kentucky Bluegrass and is available at E.H. Griffith. The variety of seeds in this mixture makes it simpler for you because the most appropriate seeds will automatically grow in moist, dry, shady or sunny areas, with rich or poor soil. If you have a problem area, you might later opt for a more specific seed.

**Tool?** Spinner spreader.

**Amount?** 7 to 9 lbs. seed per 1,000 sq. ft. It won't hurt your lawn to apply too much.

**Preparation?** Scarify or scratch lawn heavily before spreading seed and scarify lightly after spreading so that seed will contact soil. Scarify with an implement like a hand rake or power-thatching machine (you can rent one). It's not necessary to totally plow up your existing lawn before seeding. Just scarify and overseed.

**Pattern?** Go over lawn one time. If you know you should use a ½ bag to get the 7-9 lb. coverage and you still have ¼ bag after going over it once, go ahead and keep spreading until you use the correct amount. It can be tough to calibrate a spreader for seed.

**Water/rain?** Moist soil always helps seed to germinate, so water lightly twice a day if there is no rain and the soil dries out.

**Follow up?** The grasses in the Griffith "A" mix seed don't have to be watered in the summer after they are established. It's natural for them to go dormant and brown off in a drought, but they'll green up when the rains return. However, if you want to water all summer to keep your lawn a bright green color, just be prepared for the appearance of fungus in hot humid weather. Fungi may require the application of fungicides to keep your lawn alive. Naturally, these fungicides are available at E. H. Griffith.

## LIME

Spring or Fall

**When?** You can put lime down anytime during the year. Then it takes about a year for the lime to fully break down. You can apply anything else on the same day that you lime.

**Why?** If you live in Western PA, and have not applied lime in the last three or four years, it is safe to assume that you need lime to neutralize our acidic soils. Applications of lime will allow fertilizers to be more effective and help to decompose thatch. Lime is relatively inexpensive, and applying lime to your yard is one of the most cost-effective and valuable ways to improve the quality of your soil.

- Not sure? You can test your soil with a pH kit (\$9-\$12). See the Resources section above for details about Penn State's help.

**Product?** Dolomite agricultural lime is sold in 40 lb. bags. The pelletized form is preferred since it is not dusty. The agricultural lime will not burn because it is merely ground limestone. Never use the white hydrated lime used for plastering, as it can burn turf.

**Tool?** Spinner spreader.

**Amount?** The rate is 50 to 100 lbs. per 1,000 sq. ft. or one ton per acre. It's hard to use too much lime. In fact, most people make the mistake of not using enough. A nearly wide open setting on your spinner spreader should work fine.

**Pattern?** Keep spreading until lime is all applied.

**Water/rain?** It doesn't matter.

**Lawn only?** Keep lime away from rhododendron, holly, and azalea. Lime makes hydrangea blossoms pink (peat moss turns them more to blue). As a note, Muracid/Miracle Grow type fertilizer is acidic, and it's good for rhododendron, holly, and azalea.

**Follow-up?** After applying lime for 2 or 3 years, it is advisable to re-test the soil's pH. Contact an Extension Agent (see Resources above).

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## THATCH (optional)

Spring or Fall

**What?** Thatch is an underlying mat of dead grass leaves, stems, and roots. A thin layer is beneficial, but a heavy one breeds fungus, deters water infiltration, and causes grass to look awful.

### How to reduce thatch build up:

- Fertilize only in September at the proper rate. Thatch accumulates at a faster rate when too much fertilizer is used.

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(...Thatch continued)

- The grasses contained in the E.H.Griffith "A" mix are superior hybrid rye grasses, fescues, and bluegrasses which form far less thatch than some other grasses. For example, Merion bluegrass is one of the worst thatch producers. This is one more reason to overseed with Griffith "A" mix.
- You can remove existing thatch by raking severely with a hand rake or using a rental power de-thatching machine. You will probably dig up a pickup-truck-load of thatch.
- Regular lime applications help reduce thatch, as lime allows old clippings, grass stems, and roots to be decomposed more rapidly.
- Picking up clippings does not prevent thatch. Clippings decompose fairly rapidly and are not a primary source of thatch -- they are a nutrient source. Dead stems and roots decompose much more slowly and cause most of the thatch.
- While thatch can be removed in either spring or fall, you'll have more flexibility if you de-thatch in the fall. Why? You may want to fertilize and seed to help the lawn recover from the thatching operation. Since spring fertilization is frowned upon, fall is better. In addition, if you use pre-emergent crabgrass preventer in spring, you can't spread grass seed in the spring (it won't emerge, either).

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## NEW LAWN ESTABLISHMENT or TOTAL RENOVATION OF AN EXISTING LAWN

Spring or Fall

**When?** The time of the year for this work is April, May, or September.

### Products & Procedures?

- **Organic Matter (Peat Moss & Rototilling):**
  - Since you will be rototilling your yard, this will be the best opportunity you will ever have to modify and improve your soil. You don't have to buy new topsoil. It is much cheaper and just as effective to modify the soil that you already have (unless it is all rock or shale -- in which case you will have to first add some topsoil to cover the rock).
  - The goal is to add organic matter, which will enable your soil to retain more moisture and keep it from becoming hard and compacted. One of the cheapest and best ways to add

organic material is to rototill-in baled peat moss. Your goal is to create a soil composed of 40% peat moss and 60% original soil.

- To accomplish this, first rototill the existing soil to a depth of 6" or 8". Then spread 4" of peat moss over the entire yard and rototill in thoroughly. It takes a lot of rototilling to completely mix the dry fluffy peat moss with the hard compacted original soil. It is a lot of work to properly blend in the peat moss, but this is the most important step in creating good soil for your yard, which will improve the quality of your yard for many years to come.
- **Lime:** Also apply 100 lb. of pelletized agricultural lime per 1000 sq. ft. and rototill in.
- **Roll & Rake:** After the final rototilling, roll lightly to firm up the soil so you don't leave deep footprints. Rake to smooth and level the yard.
- **Seed:** Seed your lawn using E.H.Griffith's "A" mix seed, which is a mixture of Hybrid Ryegrasses, Pennlawn fescue and Kentucky bluegrass. Apply seed at the rate of 9 lb. per 1000 sq. ft. Rake in seed very lightly.
- **Fertilizer:** Apply a starter fertilizer like E.H.Griffith's Lebanon 16-25-12 at the label rate. This high phosphorus fertilizer helps in the establishment of young grass plants.
- **Water/Rain:** On days when there is no rain, water lawn lightly 3 or 4 times a day to keep the surface and new seed moist. Once the seed has germinated and sprouted, reduce watering to once a day to help young seedling grass get established.
- **Mow:** Start mowing when new grass reaches 1 and 1/2 inches or 2 inches. Set mower at 1-1/2 inches for initial mowings.

**Note:** If you are seeding a large, one or two acre estate, you probably will not choose to spend the money on the peat moss, but be sure to rototill in the lime and use the starter fertilizer before seeding.

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## SNOW MOLD

Spring

- When the snow melts in the spring, don't panic if you see gray, matted patches (each up to about six inches to one foot around). They will usually grow out, and they will recover faster if you rake the spots and loosen up the matted areas. You can spray a preventive fungicide after Thanksgiving like your local golf course does on its greens, but this isn't usually necessary at home.

# CRABGRASS CONTROL

Spring

## When?

- If you had crabgrass the year before and wish to reduce it, you should apply a pre-emergence crabgrass preventer in the spring.
- The time to apply a *pre-emergence* crabgrass preventer like Barricade is generally when forsythia (yellow) blossoms appear. Crabgrass seeds start germinating then. Just remember that no new 'good' grass seeds will germinate after you apply a pre-emergence crabgrass killer -- for about four months.
- If using a *post-emergence* product like Drive XLR8, apply it as soon as tiny crabgrass plants start to appear in June or early July. Crabgrass leaves are wider than regular grass, and they're usually lighter green.

**Why?** Crabgrass seeds germinate each spring, and the plants are killed by frost each fall. But late in the summer, the plant drops millions of seeds. Most seeds germinate the following spring, but some remain dormant in the soil for up to ten years. So, if you want to control it, you will need to treat for years, even if you didn't see any last year. It is most cost-effective to treat crabgrass with a pre-emergence chemical like Barricade, which kills the seeds (and all other grass and weed seeds) when they try to germinate. There are effective post-emergence crabgrass killers that can be used in June or July when the young crabgrass plants first start to appear, but these are more expensive than Barricade.

## Product?

- **Barricade** is excellent *pre-emergence* crabgrass killer and is available in granular form and as a wettable powder, which must be sprayed. Granular Barricade is easier to use and works well.
- The most economical *post-emergence* crabgrass killer is **Drive XLR8**. The effectiveness of Drive XLR8 is enhanced if you add a 'sticker' product right in with the spray mix. **Turbo 'sticker'** is a good brand. Turbo is relatively inexpensive.

**Tool?** Use a spinner spreader if using a granular product. Use a backpack or hand sprayer if using a wettable powder.

**Amount?** Follow product label. A 50-lb. bag of granular Barricade covers 12,500 sq. ft. One box of wettable powder Barricade (to be sprayed) covers 25,000 sq. ft.

If using Drive XLR8, it comes in a 1/2 gallon container which covers one acre (keep what you don't use for next year). Again, Turbo 'sticker' is recommended WITH the Drive XLR8, and one acre of

lawn will require three 8-oz. bottles of Turbo that you mix into the spray tank with the Drive XLR8.

**Water/rain?** WATER-IN Barricade as soon as you finish spreading it -- or apply in a rainstorm.

If using Drive XLR8 with Turbo, you'll want to make sure rain is NOT in the forecast.

## Notes:

- Barricade will also prevent other weed and grass seeds from germinating. So you cannot apply grass seed for at least four months afterward, as it won't germinate either. Therefore, plan to use Barricade in the spring to control crabgrass and to overseed in the fall.

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# INSECT & GRUB CONTROL

Summer or Spring

## When?

- If you had grub problems the previous year, you may wish to treat for grubs the next year. It is expensive, so you may wish to just grin and bear it.
- This treatment should be made in mid July if you use an insecticide like Merit or Zenith (Zenith is a generic, so it's a bit cheaper). This is the season when I have had the best luck. It is important to water-in these products.
- You can also use Merit or Zenith in the spring because it has a season-long life and should control both the spring and fall populations of grubs.
- Beware when using grub killers other than Merit or Zenith, because almost all have a very short 10-day life in the soil even if watered-in properly, and thus proper timing for applications is crucial.

**Product?** Use Merit or its generic equivalent, Zenith in mid July or in spring (as directed on label) to prevent grubs. They may seem expensive, but their longer effective life makes the cost worthwhile. Merit and Zenith are sold in granular form in 30 lb. bags, which cover 22,000 sq. ft. Merit is also available as a sprayable powder. Its package contains four 1.6 oz. packets that will each cover one acre. Watering-in either product (or applying before a predicted rain) is important. Check the ingredients on the product you are considering purchasing to be sure that it contains Merit or Zenith -- don't accept a substitute. E.H. Griffith carries Merit & Zenith.

**Tool and Amount?** Apply the granular products with a spinner spreader. If you choose to spray the Merit, use a hand held or back pack sprayer. Apply either formulation at label rates.

(continues on next page...)

(...*Insects and Grubs continued*)

**Water/rain?** It's VERY important to water-in or apply before a rain or during a rain. Dylox becomes ineffective after just one hour, Merit and Zenith *can* wait somewhat longer.

**Lawn only?** If some of the granular Merit flies into your flowers or shrubs, don't worry. It will only kill grubs and soil-borne insects.

**Why?** Most of our grub problems in Western PA are caused by the Japanese Beetle Grub. These grubs are actively eating your grass roots in the spring and fall. In June, the grubs turn into an adult Japanese Beetles and emerge from the soil. These adult beetles will lay its eggs in your yard in July. When these eggs hatch in August, the infant grubs feed on your lawn's roots until late fall. They then burrow below the frost line for the winter. How can you tell it was grub damage? There will be patches of dead or weakened grass that can easily be peeled back, because most of the roots have been eaten by the grubs. Skunks often roll back the damaged sod to feed on the grubs. Yum! I personally have had the most success treating my own yard in mid July, since it is easiest to kill infant grubs. You then avoid problems in the spring feeding season. However, be aware that during the following summer, adult Japanese Beetles will fly into your yard and lay a fresh supply of eggs. This is why I treat my yard at least every other year. If you get into September and start seeing grubs and grub damage, it is too late to treat with Merit or Zenith. It takes a while for these chemicals to activate in the soil, so they must be applied before the grubs become active. Thus if you want to treat your lawn for grubs in September, you must use an insecticide like Dylox which must be heavily watered in immediately (within one hour of application) or else the sun will quickly degrade the chemical and make it ineffective. Dylox has a short 10-day life, even when it is watered-in well, so it's not as desirable as Merit or Zenith. You'll definitely want to overseed and fertilize in the fall.

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## MOWING

Spring

**When and why?** If you mow more frequently when grass is growing rapidly, you won't have to deal with piles of clippings (so no raking, bagging, or dumping). Again, do NOT fertilize in the spring.

**Tool?** Riding or pushing...

- Is your blade sharp? Sharp blades make a much cleaner cut, leading to healthier grass.

- If you dream of owning a mulching mower, you can modify your conventional mower by carefully attaching a piece of metal to block off the grass discharge chute. Voila!
- You should cut at a height of about 1 to 1½ inches (set mower on driveway, make sure motor is off, and measure between blade and ground). Watch those fingers and toes.

**Follow-up?** Leave the clippings on that lawn, since they're a great source of nutrients – free fertilizer (and they don't create thatch).

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## FERTILIZER

Spring

- **NO!**
- Don't fertilize in spring. Many reasons are listed above in the fall section, but the best might be that it will make mowing easier. You won't get excessive top growth and thatch won't accumulate as rapidly. Don't worry -- your lawn will be nice and green thanks to natural nitrogen in spring rains and also because of the fertilizer you applied last September.

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## COMPACTION

Spring

- Freezing and thawing loosens the soil, **so aerifying is usually not necessary** for a home lawn. Home lawns don't see golf carts, and hundreds of golfers and heavy mowing equipment, like a golf course. When a golf course aerifies, the equipment they use pulls cores about 4 inches deep and spaced on 3 inch centers. You definitely don't want to roll your lawn, as it compacts the soil too much. Any mole/vole tunnels will settle down if you just tramp them down or run over them with the wheels of a lawn mower. You can also use poison mole bait in the tunnels and allow the moles several days to feed before tramping down the tunnels.

## NOTES ON LAWN SERVICES:

- It can be wonderful to let someone else mow, apply chemicals, and keep your lawn green.
- It can be difficult to find a good lawn service that will apply *only* what you need and want and also exactly *when* you want it.
- There ARE excellent services, but there are also some pitfalls, so ask questions and compare carefully before you hire someone.
  - ✓ Some services mix multiple chemicals in the same spray tank. However, what happens if weed killer (*which doesn't work if it rains because it is washed off the leaves*) and grub control (*which only works if it's watered-in to the root level*) are in the same tank? *Only one* product can work, while the other is wasted. You will be paying for a chemical that will not give you any results. Again, mixing several things in a tank is not bad – we frequently do it here at Butler's. The key is to plan to apply *only* what is appropriate for the weather on a given day.
  - ✓ One of the biggest lawn helpers is lime, but lime usually can't be mixed in the lawn service tank without degrading the other chemicals. Some services don't spread granular materials, so they won't apply the lime that you need.
  - ✓ Most services mix high-nitrogen liquid fertilizer in their spray tanks for both their spring and summer applications. These are the seasons when you *don't need* fertilizer. With all this unneeded fertilizer, in four or five years, you are guaranteed to have a thatch problem (which you may have to pay to have fixed).
  - ✓ There is no reason to aerify your yard, unless you regularly run very heavy equipment across it. We don't recommend paying for aerifying.
  - ✓ Services often use less costly insecticides that don't have a long life or must be watered-in immediately. Ask what brands will be used.
  - ✓ If you choose to apply your own fertilizer and chemicals, you can save money. You might even see better results. Why? You can adjust to the weather. If you do *just one thing* yourself, consider grub control.
  - ✓ Why grubs? If a lawn service applies a grub control insecticide in their spray tank mix at 9:00 am., and if you can't get home until 5:00, it will be too late to water it in for effective grub control because the sun has degraded the grub control chemical. On the other hand, *you* can watch the forecast or the skies. When rain is predicted shortly or it already has started to rain, run out and take ½ hour to spread your Merit or Zenith. No hoses, either! Also, if you do pay a service for grub control, be sure

to clarify *ahead of time* what they will do if you get grub damage after treatment. Note that core aeration won't kill the grubs that are still there, plus it's usually a rush job.

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## PROPERLY PRUNING TREES:

- ◆ Many people live in homes where improper or large trees -- or too many trees -- were planted.
- ◆ If your tree has grown too large for your yard or house, it's best to *take it out completely*. Most tree services will grind the stumps for you, too. Then replace the tree with one of the many trees that provide nice shade and stop growing naturally at a manageable size.
- ◆ If your tree just seems awkward or some lower limbs have started to fall off, you may prefer to hire someone to prune your tree. *Proper pruning and thinning* is not cheap, but it is well worth it! Tree professionals will remove the weakest branches at the trunk, thin the crown to let more light through, and can actually improve the health of your tree.
- ◆ Don't prune in late winter or very early spring, because this encourages the tree to come out of dormancy prematurely. The tree can then be severely damaged by late winter cold snaps.
- ◆ **We must ask you to NEVER top mature trees!** Topping is when a tree butcher (not an arborist) cuts off the middle of thick, heavy limbs along with the center leader and leaves ugly stubs. You've seen topped trees – it probably *seems* like it's the right thing to do because so many trees have been topped. Do you really look at a topped tree and think "that looks great"? Not only are they ugly, but topped trees rot and decay at the end of the thick stubs because the tree is incapable of naturally healing from this type of a wound. The tree usually deteriorates and dies prematurely. In the meantime, the stubs sprout hundreds of weak, new branches. These weak branches grow and often cannot support their own weight. They then break off easily in winds or under snow. Topped trees also produce nearly as many leaves as before the topping! People often top the tree again in about five years because it has grown out of control. *Again, we ask you to NEVER top your trees! There are better options.* The best solution for a tree that has grown too large for your yard is to have a tree service remove the entire tree. You can then plant a variety that doesn't grow as large, so it will fit in its location for its lifetime.