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“Your Home Turf Advantage”

7 STEPS TO A GREAT LAWN



As we move into the hot summer months our cool season turf often takes a beating. This is when lawns receiving proper turf management, for our unique region, will separate themselves from those that are not benefitting from all the right practices.

The inspiration for this article comes partially from the fact that we see a large number of our clients spending their hard-earned money on our services and then not achieving a thick, healthy, lush turf that very well could be the envy of their neighbourhood.

In addition to this, we have had a few inquiries over the years from clients wondering why their neighbours' lawns are thick, lush, and healthy when their neighbours receive the exact same fertilizer treatments, sometimes hours or even minutes apart. Sometimes too, we've had people saying something along the lines of "I want a lawn like Scott's". The recent hot weather has prompted a couple such phone calls.

So how can it be that some lawns are in amazing shape, while others in poorer condition when these lawns are on the exact same fertilization program? Although fertilization is an important aspect of a turf's overall health, it is only a portion of the entire picture.

For those not achieving the results they are looking for it is often evident that they are missing important aspects in their lawn care routines or not fully reaping the benefits of some practices. One can often get away with average or sub-par turf management when growing conditions are good or favourable. It's when growing conditions change from favourable to periods of high heat and/or periods of little to no rain that we begin to see which lawns are truly in the best condition. We also totally understand that summers are busy for our clients and their lawns are often not a top-of-mind item. To this point we would like to offer a few relatively easy and helpful suggestions.

The remaining portion of this article/information blurb is going to go deep into what it takes to have a healthy, robust, drought tolerant lawn. Are you ready?

Here is what I do broken down into each lawn care practice:

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1. WATERING PROPERLY (THIS IS LONG, BUT IMPORTANT)

It concerns me when I see how much water people are wasting. Take my neighbor across the street for example. During the heat wave he turned on his irrigation every night around 7PM for about 30 minutes to an hour. I'll take some of the responsibility as maybe we haven't been vocal enough about what people need to be doing. Our website is a great resource but not everyone seeks out this information.

First off, frequent watering will do nothing to help your lawn become more drought tolerant. It will only create a shallow root system and here's why...

When your lawn receives an overabundance of moisture there is no incentive, so to speak, for the roots of the grass plant to grow deeper. The roots can access the low hanging fruit or in this case, the moisture that is readily available on the surface. It's like the path of least resistance. If you were to change your watering practices to be once or twice per week and spaced apart to give your lawn a chance to dry out a little bit, the roots will go deeper into the soil to seek this available moisture. If you practice this technique over time, you will train your turf to root deeper. **Deeper roots mean a more drought tolerant lawn.**

1-2-1 METHOD

I recommend a watering technique that I like to call the 1-2-1 method. Here's how it works:

May-June (1) -

Water once per week while temps are not too crazy hot yet. How much water should you be putting down?

If you can manage $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch each time, this is optimal. Do this once per week and you will be in great shape. This is assuming not much other significant rainfall. You can skip watering as required if there is ample rainfall already. It's not a bad thing to notice your soil drying out a little and then watering as soon as you notice this. This is exactly how we train the roots of the grass plant to go deeper.

Put down a rain gauge or cylindrical container on your lawn in various places to measure the output of your irrigation system or hose/sprinkler combo and make sure coverage is consistent throughout your turf. Areas of direct sunlight will require more water than areas of partial sunlight or mostly shade. You may get away with $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch of water in shaded areas.

July-August (2) -

Assuming temps are consistently up around that 25° to 30° mark (or more) bump your watering up to twice per week, but make sure the waterings are spaced out such that the soil has a chance to dry out a little before your next watering. Remember, this is how you drive your roots deep! Try a Monday/Thursday schedule or a Tuesday/Friday schedule, whatever suits your needs.

In extreme cases of high heat and no moisture you may incorporate a third watering day, just be sure that it is spaced out with the other watering days. Remember too, that if we are receiving good rainfalls throughout the week you may not need twice per week watering or even once per week.

It's a good idea, regardless of the season, to keep track of rainfall so you can make the best watering decisions. You don't want to set and forget your irrigation system for too long! Be sure to adjust accordingly for the conditions.

August-September (1) -

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Once temperatures cool off adjust your watering to once per week, just the same as the May-June time period. Remember that the above is just a rough guideline and the biggest take away from all of this is that frequent waterings do not work, nor does not watering at all or too little! Find your happy medium with one or two deep waterings per week and your grass will thank you big time!

It's also worthy to note that the best time to water is right around the time that the sun is coming up or a bit before. Fun for a guy like me who hasn't yet spent the money on an irrigation system, but luckily, I don't mind getting up at 4 a.m. either! I enjoy a little front porch coffee admiring my home turf, but I realize that this may not be convenient for everyone.

So why not water at a different time?

Well, the grass plant is most active during the morning so this is when the grass will best utilize the water. Not only this, but less water will be lost to evaporation which is often the case with mid-day watering. Watering at night can create fungal problems, especially coupled with high temps. If you can only manage to water in the evenings then be sure that your grass has a chance to dry out a bit and isn't left moist every night, otherwise you open yourself up to a whole host of potential fungal issues.

2. MOWING

It doesn't take long for a beautifully maintained turf to be destroyed by improper mowing. Every lawn is pretty much one lawn mowing away from being harmed. It usually comes down to one of two things and all too often, both. Those items are an improper mowing height and/or dull mower blades.

I'll touch on mowing height first. It's typical to mow your lawn around a height of 2 inches at the very start of the season to clean-up any debris and/or thatch that may need to be picked up to give your lawn that clean finished look. Next, be sure to gradually raise your mowing height to a height of approximately 3-3.5 inches by the time we are into the middle to the end of June. This higher cutting height will help better shade the thatch layer and root system making your lawn better able to retain moisture and thrive during the hot and dry periods.

I went out into the field spraying this past week and talked to a client and gave him a little advice on his lawn. I uttered something like, "well firstly I would advise raising your mowing height by about an inch." He responded basically saying that he knew he should be doing this, but doesn't want his lawn looking "shaggy" like his neighbor's. This is exactly why you should be gradually raising your mowing height once you are done with your first mowing. If you are doing everything else correctly on your lawn, your lawn will not look "shaggy."

During the recent heat wave, I had my lawn bumped to 4 inches. It got a little long between mows so I was careful not to remove too much of the leaf structure and even at 4 inches, my lawn looks very well manicured. To this point, your lawn can look extremely well manicured at a higher mowing height provided that your turf is thick and healthy.

As we move into the cooler months you can begin gradually lowering your mowing height. You can again mow close to that 2-inch mark on your final mow of the season. This will best prepare your lawn for the winter ensuring that fungal diseases and/or snow mould do not become a problem within any excessive top growth left on your lawn. You will also make yourself less susceptible to vole or mouse damage as these rodents will happily choose longer turf (if available) over your lower turf for the winter months.

Lastly, when it comes to mowing height be sure not to remove very much more than 1/3 of the leaf structure on any one mowing. Removing any more than this can put a great deal of stress on any lawn.

This will also allow you to mulch or recycle your grass clippings into the lawn with no mess (assuming your

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mower is set-up to mulch with proper blades and a mulch plug) which will help feed your lawn between fertilizer applications.

The second mistake that we see all too often with mowing, is mowing with dull lawn mower blades. When you mow with dull mower blades it tears the grass plant and opens up the lawn to a greater susceptibility of fungal diseases, and other lawn issues. Keep your grass healthy by keeping your blades sharp. For most homeowners, an annual sharpening will do just fine.

Keeping mower blades spinning when you walk over concrete surfaces that may have a little sand or grit can make your blades dull more quickly so make sure you are only mowing grass with your blades and if you do have to mow in places with sand or grit be sure to inspect and/or replace your blades regularly.

3. ANNUAL OR SEMI-ANNUAL AERATION

“I aerated once, but didn’t notice much difference so I never did it again.” This is a general phrase that I have heard more than once and it’s sad to a grass man like me. Aeration is a practice that needs to be done over time. I have my turf aerated every spring and every fall.

Over time aeration will drive your roots deeper creating a more, you guessed it, drought tolerant lawn. This is why I aerate every spring and fall. Aeration is the practice of pulling small cores out of your lawn. You are then left with small holes in your lawn, resulting in less compacted soils where roots have more space to grow while air, water, and nutrients are able to penetrate the soil before these holes fill in with healthy roots and new growth.

Even if you can manage annual aeration this will be of great benefit to your lawn over time. If you have it done semi-annually, even better.

4. POWER RAKING AS REQUIRED

Power raking is the process we use to remove thatch from your lawn. Thatch is the reddish brown layer of decomposed matter that lies between the root system and the grass plant itself. See our website for a good illustration. Keeping thatch levels in check is extremely important to the health of any lawn.

How much thatch is too much? Thatch build-up of $\frac{3}{4}$ inch or more can be problematic on our turfs. You can keep an eye on your thatch levels by cutting out a core sample of your lawn and inspecting. Remember that thatch levels will not be the same in each area so it is important to take multiple samples.

Too much thatch can starve your lawn of moisture and nutrients and during periods of lots of moisture and high temps you may have issues with diseases or funguses that are thriving in the thatch layer. For this reason, there is a common misconception that thatch is bad. This isn’t true at all as a healthy layer of thatch serves to protect the root system, but remember when you get up to that $\frac{3}{4}$ inch mark you may want to consider having your lawn dethatched in the spring or fall.

5. A BALANCED FERTILIZATION PROGRAM

A balanced fertilization program is one that carefully considers the correct amount of nutrients to put down per 1000 square feet or however one decides to measure it. Luckily, you have us for this and are likely already reaping the benefits of all 4 applications timed carefully throughout the season.

Turf fertility is extremely important.

Our program does not just address the leaf structure itself in terms of working a deep green colour into

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your lawn, but our program also addresses the roots and the stems which are integral to the overall health of your lawn and drought tolerance of your lawn.

Although some clients elect not to receive all 4 applications of our program, if possible, the complete fertilization program is highly preferable so your lawn receives all the nutrients throughout the season that our program offers.

6. A BIO-STIMULANT OR SOIL ENHANCER

Although this was missing from our service offerings for a few years, we trialled a soil enhancer product in 2020 with incredible results. You can see the full results report on our website if you are into some more “light reading.”

Nonetheless I have always had a healthy and thriving lawn after a year or two of taking over my lawn from the previous owners, however with the addition of our Enrich Soil Enhancer service, I have definitely noticed my lawn more drought tolerant and requiring less water than ever before. The results are even more noticeable on some of our “problem lawns”.

Our Enrich Soil Enhancer will work 50 of the highest quality plant extracts into your lawn to help restore the interconnected relationship between the soil, micro-organisms and plants, or in this case, your grass. It helps restore the missing and depleted elements in the soil’s ecosystem. In the end you’ll have a lawn with more porous soil and better nutrient and water uptake. Our Enrich Soil Enhancer is a real winner!

7. OVERSEEDING

Every two or three years I will overseed after my spring clean-up has been completed. I always overseed with a blend that is mostly Tall Fescue, mixed with a bit of Kentucky Blue Grass and Ryegrass. Although some people consider Kentucky Blue Grass to be the most beautiful of the 3 main cool season varieties, I am a Tall Fescue guy through and through. My basic reason is it’s beautiful, lower maintenance and less finicky than it’s Kentucky Blue counterpart.

Nonetheless, it’s always important that your lawn receives new growth ever so often. Aeration is a great way to do this, but overseeding will help your lawn stay thick and lush, especially if you already have sparse turf in which case you may want to consider annual overseeding until you are able to build up your lawn.

There you have it! This is what I (Scott) do with my lawn. It may seem like a lot of information to take in, but it is really only 7 things done properly and consistently over time.

If you’re already spending on our 4 Application Program, I urge you to take everything else I am telling you seriously... I can almost guarantee if you don’t already have a lawn that is the envy of your neighbourhood, in 1 years time you will see a noticeable improvement. Do all of this for 2 years and you just may have a lawn that is the envy of your neighbourhood!

Thank you for taking the time to go over this information. I hope to see more beautiful lawns one client at a time as our clients and friends implement my 7 step strategies.

Sincerely,

Scott Kallal
President

*** **SPECIAL NOTE** ***

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We love helping our clients have great-looking lawns! Of course, we always welcome your inquiries, but we also want to help educate you, too. So many of you have told us how much you appreciate the articles we make available to you.

If there are any questions you may have about your lawn or any challenges or problems you may occasionally encounter with your lawn, don't hesitate to give us a call. As with the above info article you've just read, we also have other highly beneficial lawn care articles, too...

Here are some we've created to support you with your lawn care efforts. They can help you identify any problems as well as offer some possible solutions for some of those occasional challenges lawns can encounter.

These info articles are not meant to be one-time definitive cures for whatever might ail your lawn. We all wish it was only that simple... But, there are no magic "spray this once and your lawn will be perfect thereafter" solutions... Unfortunately, those don't really exist, as much as we might all like them to. However, there are many things you can do to get your lawn in great shape and keep it that way. We encourage you to glean what you can from any of the following articles that may interest you. And for what you're not sure about, give us a call, let's talk about it, and we'll do what we can to help you.

You may reach us at 780-678-6450 if you'd like to receive any of these via email. It would be our pleasure to do our part to help you "make your lawn the envy of your neighbours"...

From Our **"PROACTIVE LAWN CARE"** Series Of Articles —

7 Steps To A Great Lawn

Caring For Our Lawn Over The Winter

Proactively Preparing Your Lawn For Drought Conditions

From Our **"WHAT YOU'RE NOT TOLD"** Series Of Articles —

What You're Not Told About All-Natural & Organic Lawn Care Alternatives

What You're Not Told About Bats & Their Guano

From Our **"WHY?"** Series Of Articles —

Why Is My Grass So Thin?

Why Dead Spots On My Lawn?

Why Am I Getting Mushrooms In My Lawn?

Why Are The Pine Needles Killing My Grass?

From Our **"HOW TO GET RID OF..."** Series Of Articles —

How To Get Rid of Ants

How To Get Rid of Dew Worms

How To Get Rid of Fairy Rings

How To Get Rid of Quackgrass

How To Get Rid of Thistles

From Our **"DAMAGE BY DOGS & OTHER CRITTERS"** Series of Articles —

Fixing & Preventing Dog Spots

Damage Caused by Voles

...See more on next page...

From Our **"SEEDING LAWNS"** Series Of Articles —

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Grass Seeding For New Lawns
Overseeding For Existing Lawns

From Our “**DIY**” Series Of Articles —

DIY_Alternate Ways To Remove Weeds In Gravel Areas

From Our “**COMMON LAWN FUNGAL DISEASES**” Series Of Articles —

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases (Compendium Of All Common Ones)

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_The Usual Causes

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Snow Mold

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Leaf Spot & Melting Out

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Ascochyta Turf Leaf Blight

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Brown Patch

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Summer Patch

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Pythium Blight

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Red Thread

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Rust Diseases

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Powdery Mildew

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Dollar Spot

Common Lawn Fungal Diseases_Fairy Ring

INFORMATION ON OUR FIVE PRIMARY LAWN CARE SERVICES —

FERTILIZER & WEED CONTROL:

Our Fertilization & Weed Control Program

Possible Reasons For Still Having Weeds

Ten Reasons Our Program is Different

ENRICH SOIL ENHANCER:

Our Enrich Soil Enhancer Program

Different Soil Types Have Different pH Levels

WEEKLY MOWING:

How The Weekly Lawn Mowing Works

Our Quality Control Program

Ten Reasons We Are Different

CORE AERATION:

Why Aerate Your Lawn?

POWER RAKING:

Why Power-Rake Your Lawn?

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