

# Lawns



A beautiful lawn greatly enhances a garden's overall effect. While it may be one of the quieter elements in a design scheme, a carpet of rich, deep-green grass is a perfect canvas for dramatic shadows and silhouettes, and provides a natural backdrop for more showy specimen plants.

Lawn care can be more of a challenge for gardeners in our region than for our neighbors to the north and south. However, with proper variety selection and if one remains diligent, problems can be averted.

Whether you start from scratch, or plan to renovate an existing lawn, this guide will show you the best methods for the Washington metropolitan area. And of course, you can always address any questions directly to the horticultural professionals at Behnke Nurseries.

## Spring

Spring is the time to maintain and groom the lawn. In early March, any remaining leaves and debris should be raked off of the lawn area.

The best control for weeds is to have a thick, healthy, vigorously growing lawn that will out-compete most any weed. In this case, the occasional weed can be hand pulled, and herbicide (weed killer) use can be reduced.

If weeds are a serious problem, you may apply a pre-emergent herbicide (prevents the germination of weed seed). One pre-emergent product that can be used to control crabgrass is **Dimension**, which will provide good control for about three months. Always read and follow label directions. If you are overseeding the lawn in the spring, use **Tupersan**, a pre-emergent herbicide which is particularly effective against crabgrass. It will not harm your turf grass seed. The effective residual for **Tupersan** is only about six weeks, so a second application should be made in May. If broadleaf (non-grass) weeds, such as dandelion, knotweed, and plantain have been a problem, you may apply **Portrait/Gallery** as a pre-emergent in April or early May. It is effective for about four months. If any broadleaf weeds are actively growing, such as henbit or chickweed, they can be killed by applying a post-emergent herbicide (directly applied to foliage it kills systemically or by direct contact) such as **Trimec** or **Bonide Weed Beater Ultra**.

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If your lawn is bothered by insects such as grubs, you can apply a soil insecticide. **Merit**, or **Bayer Grub Control** can be applied in April and will provide control into the summer months.

Cool season grasses (such as tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass) stay green all winter. If you fertilized in the fall, it should not be necessary to fertilize in the spring. However, in the early Spring (after the ground has thawed), if the lawn is not green enough, you can apply **Turf Trust** at 1/2 the recommended rate. If you miss this early March feeding, you can apply one-half pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet and **Milorganite** in mid-May. Warm season grasses, such as zoysia, turn brown in the winter. They should receive one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in mid-May. Repeat in June if the color is poor.

## Summer

You should keep the lawn cut at the recommended height for the type of grass that is growing. Cool-season grasses should be maintained at 3 to 3½ inches and warm-season grasses should be maintained at 3/4 to 1 inch. To avoid stressing the grass, you should not remove more than 1/3 of the leaf blade at any one time.

Diseases occur when the environmental conditions are favorable, such as when the grass is wet and nights are warm and humid. The best ways to avoid diseases are to use disease-resistant types of grass and to practice good cultural methods of lawn care, such as not over-fertilizing, mowing at the proper heights, and watering properly. You should water in the morning so that the grass can dry by nightfall. Lawns should receive about one inch of water per week, with the soil moistened to a depth of about 4 to 6 inches. During periods of drought, unwatered lawns will turn brown and go dormant. They will "rest" until they are watered or rains return. Light, frequent watering, especially in the evening, can cause disease problems. If needed, fungicides such as **Banner** or **Bayleton** can be used to prevent diseases.

Japanese beetle grubs can cause severe damage to sunny lawns during the summer months. If they are a problem, you can apply **Dylox** from mid-July to mid-August.

If you want to thicken up your lawn by over-seeding, the best time to begin this renovation project is in mid-August. Any existing weeds should be killed by using selective herbicides such as **Ortho Weed-B-Gon Max** plus **Crabgrass Control** or **Bayer All-In-One Lawn Weed and Crabgrass Killer**.

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## Fall

A lawn that is being renovated should be mowed very low in early September. Collect the grass clippings, and hard rake to “de-thatch” the lawn and roughen the soil to receive new seed. Over-seed the lawn with a seed mix which has been specially blended for use in this area, such as **Behnke’s Best Grass Seed**. Make sure the seed makes contact with the soil. Exposed seed should be raked into the soil or covered lightly with **Leaf Gro**. Water lightly with a fine mist several times a day. After the seed has germinated and green sprouts are visible, water deeply with about one inch of water per week (unless it rains) to establish a vigorous, deep root system.

All cool-season lawns should be fertilized in late-September and mid-November. If you over-seeded your lawn you should fertilize after the new grass has been mowed at least once. Follow package directions for the proper application rate. Your lawn will need about 2.5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year. **Turf Trust** is an excellent slow-release fertilizer that will ensure the lawn is receiving a adequate amounts of essential nutrients.

Maintain soil pH at about 6.5 for turf grasses. Have the soil tested and apply the recommended amounts of lime in November or December. Determine your soil pH by using a soil pH meter. If you’d rather proceed without a soil test, the standard recommendation is to apply 50 pounds of limestone per 1,000 square feet to make the soil less acid.

To control broadleaf winter weeds such as henbit and chickweed, **Portrait/Gallery** or **Bonide Weed Beater Ultra** can be applied in late September. Do not apply this product if you have over-seeded or reseeded your lawn.

## Winter

Keep leaves and debris raked off the lawn. Rest-up and prepare for the coming spring!

**NOTE:** Winter is a good time to sharpen your mower blade. A sharp blade will lessen the damage done to the grass when it is mowed and will help prevent browning of the tips of the grass blades after they are cut. Leaving grass clippings on the lawn is a good practice because it returns beneficial nutrients and organic matter to the soil.

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Behnke Garden Centers  
Beltsville, MD  
(301) 937-1100  
Potomac, MD  
(301) 983-9200



Behnke Design  
& Landscape  
(240) 473-6683  
The Behnke Florist  
(301) 983-4400