

# BEST PRACTICES



## Natural Lawn Care Tips for Fall

*Fall is a fantastic time to improve the health and beauty of your lawn. Use these tips to boost your lawn and soil health, cut costs and protect our waterways from pesticide and fertilizer runoff. When spring arrives, your grass will look greener and thicker than ever!*

### Get Your Soil Tested

Test your soil about once every three years for nutrient levels, and to make sure your pH is within the proper range for a healthy lawn. Soil acidity is one of the most important factors affecting nutrient availability, root growth and microbial activity. For help on how to get a comprehensive soil analysis, contact Thurston Conservation District at 360-754-3588.

### Aerate

When cooler weather and moisture return, it's the ideal time to aerate. Annual core aeration can greatly improve the health and appearance of your lawn by increasing water infiltration rates and air circulation in compacted and poor draining soils. Aeration also improves fertilizer uptake, strengthens root development and improves heat and drought tolerance, while reducing stormwater runoff and nutrient and pesticide leaching.

Make sure to remove a 2" to 3" aeration plug, overlapping your pattern by 25 to 50%. Leave the plugs on the lawn; they will break down and add organic matter to your soil.

### Apply Lime and Fertilizer

After you aerate, apply lime to adjust soil pH. The application rate will depend on the results of your soil analysis. The standard application rate is 35 to 50 lbs. per 1,000 square feet following aeration. Allow two weeks for the lime to work into the soil before applying organic or slow release fertilizer.

Use a 50% or greater slow release or natural organic fertilizer to promote robust root and stem development. Lower nitrogen and higher potassium rates are helpful. Follow the instructions on the label carefully; never apply more than 1 lb. of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per application. Protect your health and the health of our surface waters by not using fertilizers combined with pesticides (weed and feed products).

### Top Dress with Compost and Overseed

Fall is a great time of year to overseed your lawn. Soil temperatures are still warm, and our rainy Pacific Northwest fall season provides the water needed to help the new grass plants get established.

Before seeding, apply ¼" of compost with top dresser equipment or rake evenly throughout the lawn. Top dressing with compost is great for your lawn. It helps break down thatch, germinate seeds, improves water holding capacity and adds nutrients into poor soils.



Use a high quality Pacific Northwest seed mix suited for your shade/sunlight conditions, applying 6–8 lbs. per 1,000 square feet. Then apply peat moss with a peat moss roller to cover seed. Make sure grass seeds stay moist for about two weeks or until germination.

### **Mulch Mow Leaves**

When your shade trees start dropping leaves and they begin to pile up, they block sunlight from reaching your grass, causing harm to your lawn. Here's the good news! You can cut back on raking, blowing and bagging leaves by mulch mowing light layers of leaves into the lawn. To mulch mow, just select the mulching option on your mower and mow over fallen leaves.

Mulching your leaves (leaf-cycling) is faster and far easier on your back than raking; it's also easier on our landfills. Leaf-cycling adds nutrients and organic matter to your soil, giving you richer, healthier soil for free. Also, shredded leaf bits cover the bare soil between individual grass plants, helping to suppress weed seed germination!

#### **For more information on natural lawn care:**

- **Read Thurston County's Common Sense Guide to Natural Lawn Care Guide at <http://tinyurl.com/CSGGtoLawnCare>**
- **Watch City of Olympia's Natural Yard Care Videos at <http://olympiawa.gov/city-utilities/water-resources/pollution-prevention/natural-yard-care.aspx>**

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