

Fall is good for more than just raking leaves and cooler nights. Fall is actually one of the better times of the year to improve your turf. Take advantage of these cooler temperatures and prepare your lawn for the coming spring.

Can you see your turfgrass in the lawn? Heavy layers of leaves can do a few things to your lawn. If they are thick enough, leaves can smother the lawn and also create conditions that can be favorable to snow mold. Raking or mowing the leaves on a regular basis can help to prevent this heavy layer of leaves from forming and matting down on the turf before winter. If the leaves aren't utilized in the compost pile or worked into the garden soil, they can simply be mowed over. Using the mulching blade on the lawn mower will chop up the leaves into smaller pieces that are able to filter down between the grass blades. This helps keep you from having to haul the leaves away and it also helps to add organic matter back into the soil. By removing or mulching the leaves on the lawn, you can see the condition of the turfgrass in your lawn and if there are any weeds that are present.

Knowing where the weeds are located will help in controlling them. There is still time to control pesky perennial weeds. The ideal season to control perennial weeds like ground ivy, also known as Creeping Charlie, was between September 15th and the first frost, but there is still time. Research out of Purdue shows that herbicides that contain triclopyr, like Turflon, were effective on ground ivy and retained their effectiveness when applied later in the season regardless of the first frost. The study showed that broadleaf applications should be effective when made into the first week or two of November, but control might not be seen until spring.

The life cycle of the weed will also determine whether you try to control it now or if you should wait. If the weed is a winter annual, like henbit or chickweed, fall is a good time to control them because they are small in size. Winter annual weed seeds germinated in September, they grow a little bit in the fall then really take off and grow next spring. Premixed herbicides containing 2,4-D, dicamba, and/or MCPP, are effective on most winter annual and perennial broadleaf weeds. If the weeds you fought this last year were summer annual grasses, like crabgrass or foxtails, you will have to use a different approach. For the summer annual grasses, a preemergence herbicide next spring will be your best bet. Consider a split-application if you have had a particularly hard time controlling these grasses. This will give you extended control for both the early germinating crabgrass and the later germinating foxtail.

It may be time to rethink what you knew about winterizer fertilizer applications. Previously, recommendations were to apply nitrogen during early to mid-September and then make a heavy application of nitrogen fertilization at the end of the growing season (early to mid-November). Research has shown that nitrogen fertilizer uptake is not as efficiently used later into the fall. Fertilizer that isn't taken up by the plant sits in the soil until the following spring or is leached out of the soil profile during winter. Avoid applying fertilizer too late into the fall because it won't be effectively used by the turfgrass.

With a little time and effort now, your lawn can still look green and lush next spring and hopefully with a few less weeds too.

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