

Lawn care important when preparing for a cold winter

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Every weekend of the last few months homeowners have spent mowing, weeding, edging and trimming their lawn so that it will look its best. In order to ensure a lawn makes a complete recovery after winter hibernation, one may want to spend the fall taking steps to help their lawn survive the winter months ahead.

Winterizing a lawn varies depending on how harsh a typical winter is. There are certain key tasks to complete before one can rest for the winter season.

—Remove fallen leaves and debris. Leaf cleanup is among the tasks homeowners dread the most. Raking leaves can be arduous, but it is well worth the effort. Fallen leaves can smother the grass and lead to dead spots and decay next season.

Wait until the majority of the leaves have fallen from the trees before beginning to rake; otherwise, the process may need repeated throughout the fall.

Mulched leaves can be added in small amounts to garden beds to provide rich organic material for next year's crop of flowers.

Be sure to pick up any twigs and other debris as well. Additional debris can become trapped under snow and hinder grass growth when spring arrives.

—Cut the lawn short. Unless the season is unseasonably wet and warm, a lawn shouldn't grow too much in October and November. Continue to cut the lawn until there is no visible growth for about two weeks.

It pays to give it a short cut before frost arrives so that long piles of dead grass will not smother any new growth in the spring. Also, long grass tends to bend down upon itself, trapping moisture that can lead to fungal diseases like snow mold.

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—Aerate the lawn. Soil can be compacted over time, especially in yards that see heavy foot traffic. One can rent an aerator from a lawn supply store so that water and fertilizer can reach the soil.

—Fertilize. Now is the time to give the lawn fresh food to overwinter and also replenish the strength of the root system. All summer long the lawn has been depleting the soil of nutrition, but autumn presents a great opportunity to strengthen those roots. Consider a slow-release formula designed for winterizing that will feed the lawn all winter long.

—Edge the garden beds. Take advantage of the cooler weather and slow-growing grass to re-edge around flower beds.

Even though the grass above the surface of the soil will stop growing, the roots will remain viable and the lawn will still be sending out rhizomes and tillers to produce new grass blades in the spring. These can easily encroach on garden beds. Edge now to avoid more work in the spring.

—Trim hedges and trees. If there are any overhanging tree branches or shrubbery blocking sunlight from reaching the lawn, cut back these areas once the foliage has thinned. —Seed bare patches. Scour the lawn for bare patches and put down some seed in these areas. The cooler weather will enable the seeds to germinate without having to compete with weed growth.

Once the lawn has been prepared for the winter one can bring in any lawn tools that need repair and have them set and packed away for the spring.

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