

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: mghelpline@masshort.org.

Dos, Don'ts, and If-You-Musts of Spring Lawn Care

Do:

Rake any debris left on the lawn after the winter. Raking lifts the grass, clears it of any sun-blocking leaves or other matter, and prepares it to grow.

Get a soil test. A soil test tells you exactly what you need to grow great grass. It saves you money by avoiding fertilizer and other chemicals not needed by the lawn. Reliable, low-cost soil tests are available from UMass at <http://www.umass.edu/soiltest/order.htm>.

Top-dress your lawn with compost. Compost adds fresh nutrients to the soil, improves the soil texture, and may help fill low spots making your yard easier to mow.

Patch any holes in your lawn. The simplest and cheapest method is to mix quality seed and soil together in a pail, sprinkle the mixture on a bare spot and tap it lightly to get good seed to soil contact.

Mow the lawn at 3 inches. Tall lawns support deeper roots, shade and cool the roots in summer and prevent annual weeds from germinating. Leave the clippings on the lawn to add nutrients. Clippings do not cause thatch on a healthy lawn.

If You Must:

Apply pre-emergent crabgrass killer. This should be applied just before the crabgrass germinates; a good indicator is to apply when the forsythias are blooming. Remember crabgrass can only grow in sunny areas.

Don't fertilize until May. If you fertilized in fall, you do not need to fertilize at all. If your soil test indicates you need fertilize, wait until the soil has warmed to ensure the

lawn uses the fertilizer to make the strong roots which will see the lawn through summer heat. Slow release fertilizers provide the best results. If you did not apply compost, an organic fertilizer is especially important for a healthy lawn. Always follow the directions on the bag. Spread fertilizer as evenly as possible using a drop or rotary spreader. Sweep fertilizer off hard surfaces (paved sidewalks & driveways), discard or spread on lawn. If fertilizer is allowed to run off during the next rain storm, it will contribute to algae bloom in waterways.

Avoid starting a new lawn in spring. Many weed seeds germinate in the spring and will quickly crowd out new grass. Try to live with the lawn you have now until September, when your lawn grasses will have less competition and are certain of the cooler temperatures they prefer for growing.

Don't:

Don't try to poison dandelions. The flow of nutrients in spring is so strongly root-to-leaf that poisons won't be absorbed. You can kill the leaves but not the roots. Digging them out is the only sure-fire way to eliminate them.

Don't use a poison unless you know for certain the problem you want to eliminate exists and is killed by this poison. Very few poisons only kill the thing you're after and may cause additional problems by killing its enemies (good bugs) or weakening the plant.

Never use a fertilizer mixed with a poison. If the application rate is based on the poison, it's easy to apply too much fertilizer, burning the lawn. If the application rate is based on the fertilizer, it's easy to apply too little poison, increasing the chances of breeding resistant pests or diseases. This includes pre-mixed lawn fertilizers with "weed control" or "insect control."

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>