

## Summer Lawns

Nourishing lush green lawns in New England is not without its challenges. Water is one of the biggest challenges properties face in terms of maintaining their turf. Many sites have fully automatic irrigation systems, however, many do not. This is key to having lush, healthy turf. Another factor that affects lawns in New England is the high level of clay soils. Lawns with clay soils require more frequent core-aeration to help reduce compaction from clay.

Unfortunately, though, the biggest mistake held in common when it comes to lawn care is misunderstanding the needs of different lawns. You can't just drive to your local Lowe's and pick out a bag of mixed grass seed. The most important service a lawn care company does is a soil test. This is the 'blood test' for the needs of the lawn, or, for that matter, the landscape. The results of the test will determine what inputs are required to keep your plants and lawn growing and healthy. Matching the right grass to the appropriate conditions is imperative. If an area of the property gets full sun and has adequate irrigation, we might choose a Bluegrass for that part of the landscape; but another parcel on the same property may be very shady and not receive as much irrigation, in which case we would plant fine Fescues which can survive on much less water, around 3 to 4 hours of sunlight, and go dormant during times of stress.

Even if appropriate grass seed is planted, however, choosing proper mowing heights is essential throughout the year. A common mistake that is made is to cut the grass short to reduce the total number of cuts — but cutting the grass too short in times of high heat or humidity can cause tremendous stress on the turf grass plant, leading to greater problems such as disease or weeds.

Landscape contractors agree that the most essential mistake to avoid is neglecting lawn maintenance techniques. There are two key cultural practices for yearly lawn care. The first is core-aeration, which helps with compaction and allows water, nutrients and air to flow down to the roots. This should be utilized at least once a year in early autumn, but may be repeated in the spring if needed. The second is fertilization. The current industry recommendation for fertilization is six times a year, but depending on the lawn, fertilization may vary from four to eight times. Since fertilizers are designed to address specific problems for certain times of the year, they ought to be applied at regular intervals across the year, according to directions.

In addition to these yearly applications, it is important to maintain good weekly practices, too. As with the yearly maintenance, there are two important weekly actions to consider. The first is mowing. Lawns need to be mowed at regular intervals. During the growing season, the recommendation is to mow lawns to a height of 2½ to 3 inches as long as the weather is ideal. During times of drought or extreme heat, though, the lawn contractors suggest increasing the mowing height to 4 inches or not mowing at all, because the more leaf surface that is available for cooling, the better the chance of maintaining a healthier lawn.

The second weekly practice to perform is watering. How much to water, though, can vary. Different varieties of grass require differing amounts of water. Bluegrass, for example, needs at least one inch of water a week while fine Fescue can do with less. Additionally, weather can be a factor. A rainier summer dictates less watering than a hot, dry summer. Regardless of the amount, standard protocol warns against daily watering, which can actually put more stress on the grass. The recommendation is instead to water less frequently but for a longer duration of time to allow for deeper watering down to the roots and to do so in the morning as opposed to the daytime or evening. This allows the water to most efficiently be absorbed by the grass and helps to prevent leaf diseases.

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