

Lawncare Tips for Dawsonville Homeowners

By Clark McAlister

A good home lawn requires dedication, persistence, and knowhow. Some people love mowing grass and for others it's a chore. Many newer neighborhoods have HOA covenants that require lawns to be well-manicured year-round. Whether you look forward to lawn maintenance or not, here are some tips to get your yard into tip-top shape.

Identifying your grass species is key to managing it. In Dawsonville, we generally have a few common types of grass. Cool-season grasses, mainly tall fescue, prefer cooler growing temperatures and grow best in the fall and spring. Warm-season grasses, such as hybrid Bermuda, Zoysia, and Centipede, grow best during the hotter weather of summer. Knowing this is critical for proper timing of fertilizer, weed control applications, and reseeding.

Fertilizer supplies nutrients your grass needs for lush green growth and a strong root system. The best way to determine what your yard needs is to have a soil sample analyzed. This will give fertilizer and lime recommendations for your specific soil type. Lime may be needed to increase the pH of your soil, unlocking nutrients for better uptake by grass roots. Many of our lawn grasses are heavy feeders and require several fertilizer applications each season for optimal growth.

Fertilizer comes in liquid and granular form, but I prefer the granular form. I've found that granules are easier to apply evenly using a broadcast spreader. Both soil sample reports and fertilizer packaging give fertilizer rate recommendations in pounds per 1000 square feet, so it is important to have a good estimate of your lawn's square footage. You can measure this in a variety of ways, but the easiest I've found is to break your lawn up into square-shaped sections and measure two sides. Multiply the measurements of each side (in feet) together, and that will get you the area of the lawn in square feet.

Even with diligent fertilizing, lawns will suffer if the pH is lower than what the grass prefers. Most of our grasses grow best in soils with a pH closer to 6.0. Native soils in the Dawsonville area tend to be acidic (low pH) and require additions of lime to raise soil pH. Failing to address pH deficiencies will cause your lawn to struggle year after year.

Your grass species will determine your recommended mowing height. Tall fescue needs to be mowed at 2-3 inches. Hybrid Bermuda can be mowed at 1-1.5 inches, and Zoysia lawns at 1-2 inches tall. During hot, dry weather conditions, raise your mowing height up at least another half an inch to lessen the stress on the grass. Avoid bagging your lawn clippings. Frequent mowing and letting grass clippings fall back into the lawn returns nutrients to the soil and can decrease fertilizer needs.

Irrigation can be helpful in times of drought, but too much can be detrimental. Most grasses need about one inch of water per week for decent growth, and that is often provided through natural rainfall. Our thick clay soils retain water well, so I often see overwatering issues in yards with irrigation systems on timers. Installing a rain sensor on your irrigation system, which delays watering cycles during times of adequate rainfall, prevents overwatering and helps prevent disease development.

Pre-emergent herbicides applied in the spring and fall can help lessen annual weed seed germination. Application times are based on soils temperatures and vary slightly from year to year. For weeds that

have already emerged, several herbicide options can be used, depending on the types of weeds present. Three-way mixtures of chemicals are available at most garden centers and can control a high percentage of common lawn weeds. However, no product can control every weed well. For pesky weeds that escape your control efforts, bring weed samples by your local Extension office for identification. A specialty herbicide may be available to provide better control of challenging weeds.