

In Search of the Elusive, Green Velvet Carpet

I love my lawn...some of the time.

It's a beautiful sight after being cut and trimmed, and the smell after cutting is wonderfully intoxicating. It's cool and soft on my bare feet, and it's a great carpet for outdoor fun and play.

But I feel an increasing frustration with it as the summer goes on, and frequent, hot, dry spells "burn it out." My lush, green lawn turns into a giant-sized serving of shredded wheat cereal -minus the milk! And all this, just after the heartache of dandelions and crabgrass have moved in with their families, assuming they're settling on unoccupied land and have squatters' rights. What nerve!

So, what can we, as homeowners, do to assure ourselves that our lawns will always be healthy and beautiful?

First of all, if you are seeding, keep in mind that the best time to get your lawns started is between August 15 and September 15. During this time, the seeds can germinate and young plants can establish themselves before winter sets in.

Spring seeding usually pits grass seeds against weed seeds. Also, keep in mind that you will have to give your new lawn more attention during the hot days of summer ahead.

The summer months are usually too hot for the establishment of seeds and young grass plants, so avoid this time altogether.

It's a good idea to have your soil tested before doing anything else. This will tell you which nutrients are out of balance or lacking in your soil. It will also measure the soil's pH.

A beautiful, green lawn requires healthy, rich soil right from the start. If your home is a new construction, you must enrich your soil before you plant your new turf. The majority of all lawn problems have their beginnings in the early establishment of your grass plants, so you want to give them the best start that's possible.

Enriching the soil does not mean just a top-dressing of compost, manure, or peat moss. It means mixing these ingredients in with the soil just like when you prepare a garden bed.