



STARNOTE 810
June 2009

FERTILIZING AND MAINTAINING A LAWN

Advice for keeping Lawns Healthy

A healthy, well-maintained lawn will resist most weeds and diseases. Watering properly and applying the right fertilizer for the season will give you a high quality lawn. How often should you fertilize? Much advice has been offered on this subject. Some say every 6-8 weeks; others say every 3-day weekend. Your best bet is to let the grass tell you when it needs to be fed. If the lawn has that vibrant green look everyone strives for, there is no need to apply more fertilizer. If the lawn is a little bit pale, or off-color, but fine otherwise, then feeding is indicated. You may find that fertilizing your lawn every 3 months or more is sufficient. This is especially true if using slow-release products. See StarNote 600, *Fertilizer Basics*, for a discussion of fertilizer nutrients and varieties. The time of year also determines when you may need to fertilize and which kind of fertilizer to use. StarNote 820, *Lawn Care and Maintenance Calendar*, (825 for Utah), will help you make the right choice.

Winter is a time of inactivity for turf. Low soil and air temperatures mean little growth or need for food. The soil microbes that turn fertilizer into readily available nutrients are inactive. Your lawn will go dormant, taking on that yellow-green-brown look, unless you apply fertilizers with special, quick release, forms of nitrogen to green up your grass. These are called *cool season fertilizers*. *Nitra King*[®] (19-4-4) and *Dr. Q's*[®] *Winter Gem* (21-3-7) are excellent examples. If you want to keep a green lawn through the winter, make your first application in late fall, usually about the first week of November. Bermuda grass is completely dormant in winter. It will not respond to any fertilizer at this time.

Spring brings about dynamic changes in growth and food use in lawns. You'll begin to see signs of green-up early in the season when temperatures are still in the 40s and 50s. An application of *Sulfate of Ammonia* (21-0-0) will wake the lawn at this time. A pre-emergent herbicide applied in very early spring will prevent weeds. Excellent maintenance fertilizers throughout the spring season include *Dr. Q's Royal Flush*[™] (16-4-8), or *Turf Supreme*[®] (16-6-8). Fertilize bermuda turf when signs of greening are noticed in late spring. Use *Weed & Feed* (18-4-4) to kill emerging spring weeds and feed your lawn at the same time. Avoid applying *Weed & Feed* during the summer or when temperatures exceed 80°.

Summer is a difficult time for desert lawns. Extreme heat and drying winds will easily stress improperly fertilized and maintained turf. Lawns need more water to maintain growth and color. Now is the perfect time to apply balanced, high-iron fertilizers like *Dr. Q's*[®] *Triple Play* (7-7-7) *Super Iron* (9-9-9) or continuous release varieties like *Dr. Q's*[®] *Royal Flush*[™] (16-4-8). Often a good shot of iron during the hot months is the way to go, try *Iron Worker* (33% iron) to green up that lawn without adding nitrogen. These products will give you controlled growth and rich green color. Watch for compacted lawn areas and aerate as necessary. In fescue lawns, keep grass height at about 3 inches. This helps keep soil cool and conserves lawn moisture. Keep bermuda lawns at 1 inch or less. If applying liquid weed killers like *Weed-b-Gon*[®], use as a spot treatment only or turf injury may result. Keep an eye out for insect and disease problems; consult StarNote 815, *Common Problems in Desert Lawns*, for more information.

Fall is the time to reinvigorate lawns after the tough summer. Remove thatch with a power rake or hand rake. Aerate the entire lawn and apply *Dr. Q's*[®] *Stinking Rich Steer Manure* or *Top Dressing* for soil improvement. Use the same fertilizing program in fall as you would in spring. Fertilizer applied in late October or early November provides nutrients that are stored by turf during winter and used to green up rapidly in early spring. If you're not going to over seed the lawn, apply a pre-emergent herbicide to stop appearance of fall weeds. Fertilize Bermuda grass one last time in late September to delay dormancy, or cut, de-thatch and over seed with rye grass for the coming winter.

Helpful tidbits:

- Always use a spreader when fertilizing your lawn; it's the most efficient way to evenly apply fertilizer. Spreaders also double as seed applicators.
- Water properly; adjust sprinkler timers as necessary! Read Star Note #900B for more detailed information on lawn watering considerations, or check with our Gardening Specialists.
- When mowing your lawn, never remove more than 1/3 of the growth at one time.
- Over fertilizing is bad for the grass and environment. Respond to condition of the lawn, not the calendar. If that doesn't work for you, fertilize every 3 day weekend.

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