

Home & Garden Education Center



UConn | COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE,
HEALTH AND NATURAL RESOURCES
PLANT SCIENCE AND LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE
EXTENSION

Spring Lawn Care Tips

By Pamm Cooper, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

With spring in the air, many Connecticut residents are anxious to start getting their lawns into shape. Here are some tips for a healthy and good looking lawn.

Fertilizing

It is tempting to want to fertilize as soon as lawns start to green up but wait until the grass actually is growing, especially if a fast-release nitrogen source is used. If an organic fertilizer is to be applied, wait for the soil surface temperatures to consistently remain above 50°F as the microbes in the soil that break down the fertilizer are more active when soils warm up. Never fertilize cool season grasses with nitrogen during the hot summer months. If fast-release fertilizers are used, make sure to water them in right away.

Seeding

If areas of the lawn are thin and seeding is considered, there is a tendency to want to rush out and do something before soils are warm enough to provide good seed germination. The grasses we use for lawns in New England are cool season grasses but soil temperatures above 50°F for the seed to germinate. Usually soil temperature lags a little behind air temperatures but catch up quickly. If crabgrass has been a problem where spring seeding will be done, there are two pre-emergent herbicides available for homeowners that will prevent crabgrass from invading from seed while allowing the desirable grass seed to germinate and develop. The herbicides are Tupersan™ with the active ingredient siduron, and Tenacity™ with the active ingredient mesotrione. Tenacity can also be safely applied at the time of seeding to control broadleaf weeds of over 40 species. Use these products as directed on the labels. Scott's™ has also come out with a starter fertilizer containing siduron. Both siduron and mesotrione can be re-applied, but check the labels to ensure neither is applied too soon after the first application.

Spring seeding can have mixed results. Grasses need time to establish a good root system and hot weather usually arrives before this can happen. If hot, dry conditions occur, newly seeded areas may need a deep watering once a week. If supplemental irrigation is not used, the grass will go dormant and may die if the roots are too shallow. Daily watering is ill-advised as this will serve to keep roots up where the moisture is instead of going deeper. The deeper the roots, the better it is for grasses to survive the heat or drought of summer.

Crabgrass Control

Pre-emergent crabgrass control can be considered for chronic problem areas. Note that many products will prevent not only crabgrass germination but also desirable seed germination as well sometimes lasting on the soil surface for several months. The ideal time to apply a pre-emergent crabgrass control product is between

forsythia full bloom and lilac/ flowering dogwood bloom. After that time, crabgrass has probably germinated and it is too late for any pre-emergent herbicide to be effective. See our fact sheet on [crabgrass control](#).



Crabgrass doing well in a parking lot. One plant can produce over 150,000 seeds. Image by Pamm Cooper

Grub Control

Grub control in spring can be hard to achieve. The grubs that return to the root zone are different physiologically than they were last fall. They are larger and getting ready to pupate. Most rescue products are not very effective in the spring. The best way to control grubs that are in the same areas of lawn year after year is to either apply a preventative product containing chlorantraniliprole between late April and May 15 or use an appropriate biological control product when grubs are known to be present. Make sure to water the product to the root zone of the grass, or as directed on the label with biological control products. Check out our website also for a fact sheet on [grub control](#).



Severe grub damage to roots makes it easy to pull up the grass. Image by Pamm Cooper

For questions about lawn care or any other gardening query, call the UConn Home & Garden Education Center (toll-free) at (877) 486-6271, visit www.ladybug.uconn.edu, or get in touch with your local Cooperative Extension Center.