

## **Now is a good time for lawn care**

By Jerry Clark, Agriculture Agent

One thing your neighbor does better than you is in the area of lawn care. I have answered numerous lawn care questions in my Extension career and many times the question is, "How do I get my lawn to look like my neighbor's?" Well, there are probably some very simple management differences that make one lawn look better than others. Let's take aesthetics out of the equation. It's too subjective as what I think looks good probably doesn't to someone else. Focusing on the overall health of the grass plants that make up the lawn will result in a much better-looking lawn. Many lawn management practices can be done in the fall to set up a great looking lawn next spring.

For starters, get a soil test. A soil test will indicate the status of nutrients in the soil and most laboratories will provide the fertility recommendations. Contact your local County Extension Office for soil testing information.

Fertilizing in the fall is a great time to give your lawn the nutrients it needs. Winterizing fertilizers with a higher percentage of potassium provides the nutrient a lawn requires to survive the winter and prepare it for a good start in the spring. Potassium can be applied as 0-0-60 or a blend of nitrogen and phosphorous such as 10-10-30. Organic fertilizers higher in potassium can be applied in the fall.

The more desirable grass plants that are in the lawn will compete better with weeds. Seeding in the fall is a great way to get a thicker lawn by over-seeding the existing lawns. Mowing the existing lawn very short and then over-seeding with lawn seed in the fall can result in a thicker lawn in the spring. Making sure adequate water is available to get new plants started is critical. Keep the soil to seed contact area moist. You may need to supply additional water. If over-seeding, seed the lawn by September 20 to allow time for new grass plants to get established. Fall is also a great time to control broadleaf weeds. Thickening of the lawn is one step toward reducing broadleaf weeds such as dandelion and plantain. If there is not room for a weed, it will not grow. Broadleaf herbicides are available to reduce competition from broadleaf weeds. Applying these herbicides in the fall will kill or weaken broadleaf weeds heading into winter. Weeds like dandelion are perennials and fall herbicide applications are much more effective.

If a lawn is older and becoming thin, aerating or dethatching can be done in the fall. Aeration involves a machine which pulls a core of soil and sod out of the turf and lays it on the surface. This allows air to enter the soil profile and begin to assist in decomposing of the thatch layers. If using aeration, this is a great time to fertilize and over-seed the existing lawn as fertilizer, lime, and seed comes in better contact with the soil.

Thatch is a tightly interwoven layer of living and dead tissue existing between the grass leaves and soil surface. It is composed primarily of products from stems, leaf sheaths, crowns, and roots that resist decay. Late summer and early fall is an excellent time to dethatch the lawn as the process does not damage established plants as much as in the spring. Many turf management practices can be done now to have a healthy lawn going into winter. Now is a great time to do some management to your lawn to set it up for success next year.