

What happened to my lawn this summer?

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This is the time of year that the true health of a lawn is exposed. If your lawn is a little sadder than you want it to be, fear not! Fall is the ideal time to rejuvenate it. Heights' yards are often saddled with shade from mature trees. However, turf grass needs at least four hours of sunlight to be healthy. Shade also impacts available moisture, generally contributing to increased drought conditions. In the long run, proper cultural practices will have the biggest impact on the health of your lawn. Here are some tips to keep in mind.

Mowing

Mow your grass tall. Raise the mowing height to three inches or taller. Skip a mowing or two if the lawn doesn't need it. Don't cut the lawn too short. This only encourages weeds and reduces the health of your existing grass. Sharpen your mower blades at least twice a year, if not more.

Aerating

Lawns benefit tremendously from aeration at least once per year in spring or fall. Aeration is the process of removing cores of soil allowing air to get to the roots. It helps to alleviate compacted soil and encourages better surface drainage. You can rent an aerator or hire a service provider to do it for you. Shady lawns that have moss, or those that have not been aerated recently, will benefit tremendously from aeration twice a year. The soil should be slightly moist for good penetration. Aerating the lawn twice in two directions will not hurt it.

De-Thatching

Thatch is a layer of dead bio-mass that has not decomposed between the turf



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grass plant and the soil. It occurs in lawns that are actively growing or have been undermaintained over the years. It builds up and creates an impermeable layer that prevents moisture and fertilizer from getting to the soil and roots. Some thatch is good as it helps to stabilize and cool the soil, but more than one-half inch of thatch is problematic. To remove thatch, simply use a rake and lots of effort or rent a power de-thatcher or verti-cutter. Aggressively removing thatch may require some spot seeding in areas that become thin. Not all lawns need to be de-thatched, so check it first.

Top Dressing

Healthy soil is the building block for a lush, full lawn. Any lawn can be improved by top dressing with materials like compost or leaf humus. Since area lawns have heavy clay with little organic matter in the soil, adding organic matter like compost improves the soil composition, which results in healthier grass. Over application will smother the grass. When

top dressing, a little bit goes a long way. Plan to buy material in bulk quantity if possible. Measure your lawn area and determine the square footage (length x width = square feet). One quarter inch of compost spread out over 3,000 square feet will require approximately three cubic yards of material (or about 45 two cubic foot bags of product).

Instant cures are for late night infomercials. Please remember, good maintenance practices applied over time will provide the best results. The work you put into your lawn this fall will pay big dividends next year and help your lawn survive next summer's heat. For fact sheets on lawn care, visit <http://webgarden.osu.edu>.

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