

Autumn lawncare

Doing just a few lawncare activities in the autumn will help to keep your lawn in great shape and get it off to a flying start the following year. It doesn't take too long and is well worth the time and effort..

Step 1 – Apply an autumn feed

Autumn lawn fertilizers differ from those applied in the spring in that the balance of nutrients encourages good root growth. This helps with drought resistance and vigour the following year. The autumn feeds also toughen up the top growth, making it better equipped to deal with the rigours of winter. Autumn feeds are available as either granular, liquid or soluble. Some also have a mosskiller incorporated, so choose one of these if moss is a problem on the lawn.

Granular feeds are best applied with a spreader. The soil should be relatively moist and the grass should be dry at the time of application. If the weather is on the damp side, you may be better opting for a liquid or soluble feed, as it is fine to apply these to damp or wet grass. For larger areas of turf, choose a liquid that can be applied with a sprayer or a soluble powder that may be applied with a hose end dilutor rather than a watering can, as this will save you time.

Step 2 – Rake out any treated moss

If you have applied a mosskiller it is important to rake out any treated moss once it has turned black. Use either a spring tine rake with good downward pressure, or an electric scarifier (these may be hired from most tool hire outlets) if there is a large area to treat. It is quite hard work to scarify manually, so it may be beneficial to divide the lawn and tackle smaller areas rather than the whole lot in one go. The lawn will also look a bit of a mess immediately afterwards, but in no time at all it will look much, much better and really benefit from the treatment.

Step 3 – Aerate the lawn

The lawn is likely to be compacted after summer usage, particularly if the soil is on the heavy side. To aerate the lawn, spike with either a garden fork or lawn aerator to a depth of at least three inches (7-8cm). It is advisable to wait until there is some moisture in the ground otherwise clay soils, in particular, can be so hard it will be difficult to get a fork or aerator in. It is also a good idea to use a reasonably good quality fork/aerator that won't bend under the strain!

Step 4 – Overseed the lawn

This is an excellent way to thicken and renew the lawn and really does give it a new lease of life. Essentially, it involves applying grass seed over an existing lawn and is a practice use by green keepers to keep football pitches, golf courses etc in good condition.

Firstly, lightly rake over the surface of the lawn with a spring tine rake (unless you have recently raked out treated lawn moss, in which case there is no need to do this). Then apply the grass seed – choose a type of grass seed that suits your lifestyle (check with the packs or a member of staff from the garden centre). The seed should be applied at a rate of about 20grammes per square metre (this is roughly a small handful over two square metres).

Step 5 – Apply a top dressing

This will help the grass seed to 'take' after overseeding but, even if you do not overseed, it is still very beneficial and will help improve the health and appearance of the lawn and the texture of the soil. You can buy ready mixed turf dressing or make your own, according to your specific needs (for further details on making your own top dressing please refer to the New Lawn Expert). All you have to do is to apply a good spadeful every square metre or so and brush it evenly over the lawn, (and working it into the holes if you have spiked the lawn.)

If you are interested in learning more about lawn care, the 'New Lawn Expert' is an excellent reference