

Green-Up that Spring Lawn
By Meg Gaeta, CPVGC Master Gardener



In my book there is not much more soothing than a healthy, green lawn. It brings back the memories of youth and those hot summer days with no agenda.

Colorado, with her temperamentally crazy spring weather is difficult to manage when it comes to the timelines of spring greening. My plan is to try to outwit the weather ...with some preparation.

Maintaining a healthy lawn cuts back the necessity of water dramatically! Proper watering promotes deeply rooted, healthier turf. Lawn roots can reach down as deep as 6 inches. A healthy lawn only requires 2.5 inches of water a week. Watering 2-3 days per week promotes roots to reach for water, which in turn protects it from wilting and browning.

The best way to begin your spring is the previous fall with a season-end fertilizing. If you missed it, make a note on your calendar for next year. It is not essential, just helpful in the quest for green.

Thatch, that brown build-up of dead looking grass near the roots of the turf can be a deterrent to allowing the root to receive both water and nutrients. A light, shallow power raking of wet, matted turf can speed up spring green by allowing air into the root zone. Then, in between those seasonal storms call in an aeration company to pull 2-3 inch plugs of sod (the longer, the better) every 2 inches. I have found that many of the aerators don't want to pull the plugs so densely but I insist and ask for a second pass. It may look like they have beaten up your lawn but in 3 weeks you will be happy you insisted. They usually charge around \$35, but I always tip for the

extra pass. Allow the cores to disintegrate back into the lawn. Irrigation and mulch mowing will help this process but if your irrigation system is not activated be patient. Do not rake the plugs up unless you're hosting Wine in the Garden this week!

Nitrogen is the best and quickest greening fertilizer. However, if you allow the clippings to fall back into the lawn, you can reduce nitrogen application to $\frac{1}{4}$. (See below to determine how much to add and when.) Clippings decompose quickly and provide a source of recycled nutrients and organic matter. Your mulching blade clippings will not contribute to thatching accumulation.

Make sure that your mower's blade is sharpened at least twice during the season. It is recommended that we mow to a height of 2-3 inches, never removing more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the length of the blade at any one time. For this reason, there may be a 4-6 week period of premium growing season when you need to mow every 5 days rather than every 7-10 at the beginning and end of the growing season. (Aren't we all looking for a nice brisk walk in the high season?)

One last note to a healthy, green lawn: It is better to water two times in one day, especially if you are concerned about run-off in a slope situation, than it is to water 5 or 7 days a week. Place a cup in 3 areas of you lawn to see how much water your system is supplying. If there is uneven distribution, correct it rather than over watering other areas to make it up.

If you can manage to follow this simple preparation you just might want to buy a couple of extra Adirondacks for that special green gazing you'll want to indulge in.

For more information go to www.cmg.colostate.edu/pubs/lawns.html#lawnest

