Hello Walden Homeowners. I attended a Colorado State University class on Lawn Care and have some interesting information to share with all of you. Spring is on its way and those of you with Bluegrass Lawns (or other types) should be thinking about the Lawn Fundamentals of Aerating, Watering, Fertilizing and Mowing. What I will cover here goes a little beyond that but is key to a healthy, low maintenance Lawn.

***Aeration***

Often overlooked, Aeration basically pokes holes in the ground, pulls a plug of soil out, and allows the Lawn to ‘Breathe’ by providing a path for air, nutrients, water, helps keeps good microbes alive, and helps stimulate root growth.

For a healthy Lawn, Aeration should be done in both the Spring and Fall. April is the best springtime, and September the best fall time. Plugs can remain on the surface and will decompose back into the ground over time. You will notice that thatch buildup will also be reduced allowing water to go deep into the soil rather than remaining on the surface and evaporating in the sun. And the key point in the entire process is that Aeration reduces soil compaction, which is the enemy to good root expansion.

***Fertilization***

A Lawn should be fertilized (3) times per year. Spring, Mid-Summer, and Fall. Because we are at a high altitude which has more concentrated sunlight, the instructor recommended a 15-5-5 to prevent burning the Lawn. Also make the summer feeding a bit lighter than the Spring and Fall feedings.

Nitrogen is the key component in fertilizer, but the Potassium, Phosphorus, Iron, and Sulfur safeguard against nutrient deficiency. Liquid fertilizer gets into the soil quicker, but a granular fertilizer uses a ‘slow release’ process thus feeding your Lawn for a longer period of time, and prevents burning the grass. You may want to skip the mid-summer feeding altogether, or try to time it before a rainy day. In Colorado, forecasting the weather is more of an art than it is a given process.

Applying fertilizer can be done in one of two ways. Use a drop spreader for small areas and overlap the wheel marks. A broadcast spreader allows you to cover a large area in a short period of time. Plus a broadcast spreader lets you distribute fertilizer evenly and eliminates those nasty light spots drop spreaders tend to leave because the wheels did not overlap the drop zone.

***Weed Control***

The best way to combat weeds is to have a healthy, thick Lawn. But that is often not the case today, especially with the Colorado winds that can carry weed seeds for miles. So the best time for weed control is in March and September.

Also, weed control is a process separate from fertilizing. Why? Products that combine fertilizer and weed control actually counteract each other. The weed gets hit with a shot of weed control, and then the fertilizer helps some of the weeds recover. So the best way to approach this is to use weed control one weekend - - let it work - - then next weekend fertilize and water it in. That way the weed control process is established, the weed begins to wither, and the fertilization process has negligible effect on bringing the weed back to life.

March is the best time for pre-emergent weed killer since the goal is to stop the seed from sprouting. Post-emergent weed control can be done during the Summer and Fall with the intention of treating a weed that has already germinated.

Crabgrass, Knotweed, and Pigweed are annual plants that rely upon seed propagation to reproduce. Pre-emergents help to prevent the seed from growing. But your real culprits are the perennial weeds like the Dandelion, Bindweed, Canada Thistle, Myrtle Spurge, and Plantain. Treat them with a herbicide that is specially mixed for these weeds.

Bindweed is the toughest weed to remove since its root structure goes deep into the ground. One suggestion made by the instructor is to cut out the bottom of a plastic cup (like a Freddy’s drink cup), put it over the weed, and treat it with a shot of roundup. That way you directly treat the weed and not the surrounding grass.

***Watering your Lawn***

We have expensive water in Walden as attested by our summer water bills, so conservation is key to a healthy Lawn and low water bill. The deeper the grass root system, the less water required. So you see how Aeration, Fertilizing, and Weed Control play an important role in reducing water usage.

Look for the telltale signs that your Lawn needs water: Grass has a Blue-Gray color, and footprints remain after an hour. What is the best amount depends on the soil. Sandy loamy soil requires more water because they are more porous than clay soils. The best way to determine the right amount of water is to use a cup to capture the amount of water being applied. Use your zone timer or flow control to make adjustments.

Water amount is dependent on the grass. Bluegrass may need as much as 2.25 inches of water per week, while blue grama lawns can stay green for weeks without watering. Remember this fundamental: a healthy lawn = a deep root structure = a low water bill.

***Bugs (aka mites)***

These mite critters love to suck the nutrients out of your grass, and are very destructive in drought seasons. These guys love hot dry areas. Of the (3) mite amigos (clover, banks, and brown), the Banks mite is the most destructive.

The best way to control these mites is simple. They hate moisture. By watering around your home in the evening you can keep them from invading the inside of your house, and by keeping your Lawn properly watered you keep them from sucking nutrients out of your grass.

Mites can be treated with (expensive) chemicals, but this treatment will also destroy their natural enemies. So the best action is by using water which will send them packing to drier country.

***Mowing your Lawn***

Nothing is more beautiful than a healthy, freshly mowed lawn. A certain sense of pride appears which often overrides the effort and labor one puts into the project. (Give or take a few achy joints)

Mowing height is a key component to the healthy lawn equation. This magic number is 3” after mowing. During hot summer days it is safe to go to 3 ½ “. Tall lawns help increase photosynthetic tissue, reduce lawn stress, and help increase root depth as well as keeping the lawn healthy.

Following the magic number requires one to measure the grass height, and adjusting your mower height to leave 3” of grass height after cutting. Also recommended is a mulching attachment that recuts the grass blade into a finer blend that will return nutrients back to the soil.

***Closing Comments***

***The WPOA Lawn Maintenance provider, Grebenik Lawn Services, is offering a special on Aeration services to all WPOA homeowners. Interested parties can contact them at 719-505-5910 or email Grebenik@gmail.com for more information, prices, and to schedule an appointment. They will tell you when the time is right, and what preparation needs to be taken prior to the Aeration process.\*\****

\*\*The intent of the paragraph above (displayed in bold italics) regarding Aeration services, is to inform homeowners who do not have this service already provided of a potential source. It is not intended to endorse, displace another service, or discourage a do-it-yourselfer.

Although there are products off the shelf that will help you control common weeds, there are also specialty products that require the application be done by a Colorado licensed specialist. Always read the label and ask questions on anything before making a purchase and applying it to your yard.

I have been reading up on Lawn Renovation and the steps to do it correctly. My plan is to write a WPOA Landscape note based on my findings. Seeding versus Sodding will be a key point discussed in the notes as well as soil preparation. Like I said earlier, nothing is more beautiful than a healthy, freshly mowed lawn.