



Fall YardScaping Tips

“Taking care of your yard in the fall will prevent the need for pesticides and fertilizers next year,” says lawn expert, Gary Fish, of the Maine Board of Pesticides Control and YardScaping Partnership. “Too often homeowners are led to believe that yard care begins in the springtime. After all, that’s when advertisers hawk the widespread use of weed killers and fertilizers—whether your yard and lawn need them or not.” But there are some valuable steps you can take between Columbus Day and Halloween that will pay off in the spring.

Lower lawn mower height: Your normal grass height of 2½ to 3½ inches needs to be reduced gradually to 1½ to 2 inches. Reduce the height by one-half inch every two weeks. Lower grass height takes some of the effort out of leaf raking and makes the lawn less attractive to snow mold fungi and nesting rodents.

Water thoroughly: If rain is sparse, be sure to water all lawn and plant areas—especially evergreen shrubs. Adequate soil moisture protects plants from winter injury.

Rake, mulch, and cover: Mulch or rake leaves off lawn areas as soon as possible. Tender plants benefit from leaf, needle, or other mulches and evergreen plants appreciate wintertime protection with anti-transpirant materials such as WILT-PRUF[®], which reduce water loss. Cover plants that grow under roof eaves. Packed, falling snow can break even the healthiest shrub.

Build up roots with selective fertilizer use: Fall is the best time to feed your lawn. It is when the fertilizer benefits the grass instead of the weeds and helps build a healthy root system. A soil test is essential for understanding its exact nutritional needs. Depending on soil test results, add no more than one-half to one pound of nitrogen and one-half pound of potassium per 1,000 square feet of turf. The best fertilizers are composted organic material or contain either slow- or timed-release nitrogen. Because no phosphorus should be needed on established lawns, a sample fertilizer label could read 6-0-3 or 30-0-15.

De-thatch and/or aerate: Thatch is an essential organic mat between your grass’ blades and roots. Thatch thicker than one-half inch, however, stresses grass and invites opportunistic weeds. De-thatching works wonders for strengthening turf, while aeration does that and more. Aeration reduces thatch and improves soil structure. Seeding over freshly aerated turf is feasible right up to the end of the growing season—just be sure to water thoroughly.

“These steps are a good investment of your time,” notes Fish. “Winter throws many challenges at landscapes. Plants better fortified by care now will be better able to greet the new growing season with less need for pesticides, fertilizers, and especially your time. That’s good for the environment, your wallet, and leisure time.”

With questions or for more information about low-impact lawn care alternatives, contact Gary Fish at gary.fish@maine.gov, or check out **YardScaping for a Healthy Maine:** www.yardscaping.org (look for the free Maine YardScaping lawn sign!).

YardScaping hopes to inspire Maine people to create and maintain healthy landscapes through ecologically based practices that minimize reliance on water, fertilizer, and pesticides. The Maine YardScaping Partnership was formed out of the rising concern among statewide organizations and agencies over the possible pollution caused by yard care chemicals washing away into water bodies, as well as the risks of pesticide exposure to people, pets, and wildlife.