

SPECIAL  
POINTS OF  
INTEREST:

- Resist the urge to fertilize! Unless you have Bermuda or Zoysia, spring is not the best time.
- Wait to apply preemergent crabgrass preventer until the forsythia is blooming in your neighborhood.

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# BEST LAWNS

NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2010

## Great Scapes Give Way to BEST Lawns

Knowing that healthy lawns contribute to healthy waterways, Prince William County developed the Great Scapes program to help homeowners better manage their lawns. In an effort to emphasize the program's focus of turf rather than landscapes as a whole, Great Scapes is now the BEST Lawns program. The program's goal is to help homeowners **Build Environmentally Sustainable Turf**. Though the name has changed, the program is still based on years of Virginia Tech research on turf in northern Virginia region.

Should you have any questions about the program or any of the topics covered in our handbook, please contact the Extension Horticulture Help Desk at 703-792-7747 or email [master\\_gardener @pwccgov.org](mailto:master_gardener@pwccgov.org).

## Weed Control Applications for Spring

Preemergent Herbicides: for crabgrass and other summer annual weeds, apply when forsythia, daffodils, and/or dogwoods are blooming prolifically. Forsythia and daffodils bloom early in this window, dogwoods at the end of the recommended application period. It is necessary to water in all preemergent herbicides. Most products need at least 1/4-inch water within 48 hours of application, otherwise the herbicide will begin decomposing from sunlight. Tip: if not overseeding in the fall, buy an extra bag now for a fall application to prevent poa annua and other winter annuals from germinating. Preemergents are not widely sold in the fall.

Weed-and-Feed Applications: most weed-and-feed products on the market contain a high percentage of nitrogen. High amounts of nitrogen in the spring can over-stimulate shoot growth at the expense of root development. **Avoid these combo products in the spring**; you can use them in the fall when fertilization is best utilized by cool-season

grasses. Resist the urge to fertilize in the spring—your lawn will soon green up on its own.

Postemergent Broadleaf Weed Control: these types of herbicides are effective when the weeds are actively growing, typically when daytime temperatures are 70°F or above. Combo products as discussed in the October 2006 issue are effective choices. With typical seasonal temperatures, an application in April and a second in May will give you good control.

Sedges: sedges can be distinguished from grasses by their triangular stem. Sedges often occur in over-watered lawns or in seasons of high rain. While annual and perennial varieties exist in Virginia, perennial yellow nutsedge tends to be the most troublesome sedge in home lawns. Treat with broad spectrum sedge-control products such as halosulfuron (Manage™) or those containing MSMA and bentazon. Treat when sedges are actively growing in late spring and summer. Cultural control: avoid overwatering the lawn.



Herbicides are most effective when applied at the right temperature

*“Regular tune-ups can reduce fuel consumption by up to 30 percent and emissions by up to 50 percent.”*



Change the spark plug at least once a season

## Herbicides: How To Use and When

In Virginia we have two crops of annual broadleaf weeds in the lawn. They are referred to as summer and winter annuals. Both are easily controlled with weed killers that have a combination of 2 or 3 active ingredients and are sold at most garden centers. Look for products that contain at least 2 of the following: 2,4-D, dicamba, and MCP. Three-way combinations work best. For best results use a liquid formulation that enables you to cover the leaf surface of small weeds more effectively. Treat the entire lawn.

Systemic weed killers work by translocating through the leaves, killing the roots and the entire plant. In order for these chemicals to be effective, the temperature must be at least 60 degrees for a minimum of 2 days. While dicamba moves in the soil and should not be used within the root area of shallow rooted trees or shrubs, the low rate of dicamba in a three-way mixture reduces the possibility of dicamba injury.

Mature winter annuals are out now, such as chickweed and henbit. Treating these weeds now MAY help control their populations by killing them off before they have a chance to flower and set seed. However the more mature the weed, the more resistant to chemicals it will be. Weed control is most effective on young weeds. Treat winter weeds in the fall for optimum control. You can use the same herbicide combo in April and May to treat tender summer annuals as they emerge.

## Spring Tune-Up Can Help the Environment and Your Wallet

Why tune up your lawn mower? There are a number of benefits for the environment and for you. A well-maintained mower reduces emissions by up to 50 percent, protecting the environment, and reduces fuel consumption by up to 30 percent, conserving natural resources. A tune-up and some simple maintenance will extend the life of your equipment, restore horsepower up to 7.5 percent, and improve the startability of your engine. Detailed instructions can be found in the [VT Mow Like A Pro](http://breeze.ag.vt.edu/pl1042926) presentation found at <http://breeze.ag.vt.edu/pl1042926>.

**Change the oil:** A typical engine tune-up includes changing the oil, spark plugs and air filter. For optimum performance, change the oil in your small engine at least once per season, or every 25 hours of use. Most small engine manufacturers provide maintenance kits that come with the correct oil for your engine. You can also purchase oil separately.

Start the engine and run it until it is warm. Stop the engine. **WARNING:** Be sure to disconnect the spark plug wire, and secure it away from the spark plug to prevent accidental starting. Remove the dipstick, if equipped. Drain the old oil by tipping the mower on its side. Remember to catch this old oil and recycle it at a transfer station; do not release the used oil into the environment. Replace the oil filter if engine is equipped with one. Fill with new oil as specified in your owner's manual. Most small engines hold 20 oz. Next...

**Change the spark plug:** Changing your spark plug is one of the easiest ways to ensure accurate and easy engine starts. For best results, change the plug at least once a year. Some spark plugs are pre-gapped, so all you need to do is remove the old spark plug and replace it with the new one. If the plug is not gapped, gap it according to manufacturer's specifications.

Be sure the engine is stopped. Disconnect the spark plug wire, and clean the area around the spark plug to avoid getting debris in the combustion chamber when you remove the plug. Remove the spark plug using a spark plug socket and/or socket wrench. Install new spark plug finger tight, then tighten a quarter to third turn more with socket wrench. Then...

**Replace the air filter:** Most mowers nowadays come with simple to replace air filters. Usually the air filter is held in place with several prongs. Remove the old filter and replace with one as recommended in the owner's manual.

Now you're ready to start your engine! Attach the spark plug wire to the plug, run the engine at idle and check for leaks.

# Stay Sharp For A Better Cut



**Dull-mower ‘disease’; damage to fescue by a dull mower blade**

You may spend a lot of time and money on your lawn—seeding & fertilizing, liming & aerating, weed control, mowing. All your efforts to have a dark green, healthy lawn may be for not if you’re mowing with a dull blade. Dull blades do not cut cleanly, but rather shred the ends of the leaf blades which dry out and give a whitish cast to the lawn. These shredded ends are open wounds through which disease can enter.

Research in a University of Nebraska study shows that repeated mowing with a dull blade increases disease problems in turf. The same report also showed that mowing with a sharp blade used 22 percent less fuel than mowing with a dull blade—something to consider with the current cost of fuel.

Sharpen blades after about 10 hours of general use, typically between 10 and 20 mowings depending on the size of your lawn (~ 2 to 3 times per season). Wet lawns and thin lawns with a lot of dirt or sand tend to dull blades immediately. Mowing over twigs and branches will also dull the blade more quickly.

You can sharpen your blade at home by using a grinder or file. If you own a Dremel, you can purchase a specific Dremel attachment for blade sharpening. Many retail stores will also sharpen blades for a nominal fee. If you cannot sharpen the blade, replace it twice a year. Remember to balance the blade to prevent scalping.

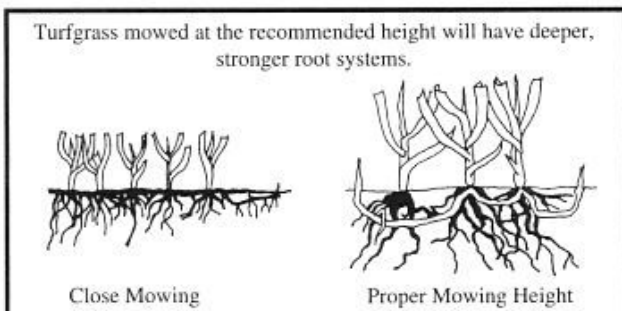
## A Little Off the Top: Proper Mowing Guide Height

A key element in maintaining a healthy lawn is keeping grass at the correct height. When cut too short, grasses don’t have enough leaf area for photosynthesis and develop weak, shallow root systems that can’t adequately deal with the stress of a summer drought. Excessively short turf also allows the soil to heat quicker in the summer increasing the likelihood of plant loss under drought stress.

Typical cool season grasses used in our area should be maintained around 2.5 inches for optimal root growth. (See chart below)

- Cutting closer to the minimum in the spring and fall fosters new growth and denser turf.
- Cutting higher as summer approaches will cool the soil, help retain moisture, and suppress weed germination.
- When possible, cut when the grass is dry to make mowing easier.
- **Remember** cutting more than 1/3rd of the height will stress and weaken your grass.

Turfgrass Species	Mowing Heights During	
	Spring and Fall	Summer Stress Periods
Kentucky bluegrass	2.0 - 2.5	2.5 - 3.0
Perennial ryegrass	2.0 - 2.5	2.5 - 3.0
Fine Fescues	2.0 - 2.5	2.5 - 3.0
Tall Fescue	2.5 - 3.0	2.5 - 3.0



# Other VCE Programs of Interest

## 10 Steps to a Greener Lawn

From 9:00 am to 10:30 am on :

March 20, St. Margaret's Anglican Church, Woodbridge. Focus: 10 Ways to keep your grass green and the water clean.

## Vegetable Gardening Series

From 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm on :

February 4th, Sustainable Gardening Part I, Chinn Park Regional Library. Topics include: soil fertility and best practices for tilling and cultivation.

February 18th, Sustainable Gardening Part II, Central Library. Topics include: planning your garden calendar, crop rotation, and companion planting.

March 30th, Sustainable Gardening Part III, Chinn Park Regional Library. Topics include: propagation, seedling development, and transplanting techniques.

April 10th, Hands On Gardening Part I, Teaching Garden at St. Benedict Monastery. Topics include: Preparing and improving vegetable garden soil.

May 15th, Hands On Gardening Part II, Teaching Garden at St. Benedict Monastery. Topics include: How to plant seedlings and direct sow seeds.

## Master Gardener Saturdays in The Garden

Saturdays, April 10th, May 15th, June 12th, July 10th, August 14th, September 11th and October 2nd, from 9:60 am to Noon at the Teaching Garden at St. Benedict Monastery. Call 703-792-7747 for more information

## Master Gardener Clinics at Local Garden Centers

Saturdays, April 17th and 24th and May 1st, 15th, and 22nd, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm. Store locations to be announced. Call 703-792-7747 for more information.

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All programs are free.

Registration is requested for all

except

Garden Center clinics.

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