**Lawn Care in February**

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With the wonderful weather this month we get anxious for our lawns to green-up. I write an article each year at this time to discuss recommended lawn care and what factors contributes to lawn green-up.

As much as you want to rush your lawn green up, it does not do any good to fertilize the lawn early. Our hot weather grasses can only take up the nitrogen from fertilizer after they have an active top growth. Wait to fertilize your lawn until you have mowed real grass two times. That will normally be between April 15 and May 1.

Lawn green-up is mostly determined by the weather with the help of nutrients that were collected and stored last fall. The fall fertilization has more influence on spring green-up than the spring fertilizer.

In terms of lawn health, the most beneficial thing you can do is to aerate and top dress the lawn.

Rent an aerator that cuts plugs from the lawn and lays them on the lawn surface. The aeration helps address soil compaction by letting air, water and nutrients penetrate to the root system.

Aeration contributes greatly to lawn performance. The impact can be even greater if the aeration is complemented by top dressing.

Top dressing is the act of spreading a thin layer of compost over the surface of the lawn after the aeration. Some of the compost filters into the aeration channels to bring organic material into the root zone.

The winter weeds have germinated and are going to try to produce seeds for next winter’s crop. Keep them mowed or pulled to prevent seed production. You can apply a contact herbicide to kill the growing plants but the action can be unpredictable in cold weather.

To prevent summer weeds, apply a pre-emergent herbicide in late February or early March. Portrait is a good product to prevent broadleaf weeds. Crabgrass Control, Amaze and XL all do a good job at preventing crabgrass and sandburs.

Water is another factor in lawn health and spring green-up. The grass will need a generous water application every 3 weeks from rain or irrigation to stay in prime condition to respond to warm weather, but it does not do any good to water more often until the warm weather of late spring has arrived.

Operate your irrigation system manually so you can apply enough to keep the roots moist but not apply water that is wasted because the plant is not actively growing.

It is also a good time to have your irrigation contractor check out your system to test the backflow preventer, the rain sensor, and look for malfunctioning heads and leaks.