**Primetime**

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Wednesday, February 1, 2012

Green Lawn and Leaner Water Bill

It is too early to fertilize the lawn but it is a great time to aerate and top dress. Rent one of the aerators that cut plugs out of the soil and lays them on the soil surface. The hole that is left lets air, moisture, and nutrients penetrate to the grass roots. It helps alleviate soil compaction that naturally occurs in our soils.

If you want to increase the value of the aeration, top dress with compost immediately after the aeration is completed. The organic material penetrates the aeration channels but by the nature of the organic material it does not reduce the benefit of the aeration to allow air or moisture to penetrate the lawn. The organic material enriches the root zone. This process is the one-way to incorporate organic material into an established lawn.

I recommend compost instead of any commercial top dressing material that includes sand. Sand is an inert material; the compost is the beneficial part of the application. It is nearly the same price for compost as for the sand dominated top dressing so buy the “real stuff.”

It is easy to purchase and spread compost on the lawn. Call Keller Material, Fertile Garden Supply, Garden Ville, New Earth or any of the other horticultural supply retailers. They will delivery compost at a cost of approximately $25 per cubic yard plus $35 for delivery. A dump truck can haul four to six cubic yards.

You only need to apply one-quarter to one-half inch of the compost over the lawn surface. At one-quarter inch deep, order one cubic yard of compost for every 1300 sq. ft. of lawn. That means a typical lawn that is a 40 by 100 feet would require less than four cubic yards of compost.

Spreading compost is a good daydream job. You do not have to be fussy or exact. It is a great way to enjoy this great weather and get some exercise. The impact on your lawn is well worth the cost and effort.

In addition to opening up the root zone to gas exchange, more efficient nutrient use, and increased microbial activity – the aeration/top dressing has a significant impact on water efficiency. Your lawn will be greener and your water bill will be leaner.

If aeration and top dressing sounds like a good idea to you but you don’t have the time or physical ability to do the job yourself, consider utilizing one of two contractors I am familiar with to do the job. If they do the work the costs will be at least double but still reasonable. Check out TruGreen 210-654-3361 or \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

The contractor will run an aerator over your lawn and then use a big machine like a reverse vacuum cleaner to blow the compost to all corners of the lawn. It is fast and neat.

Compost applied as a top dressing is a fast way to supply organic material to an established lawn but it is not the only way. Recycling your leaves helps as well. Leaves that fall on the lawn will decompose quickly and contribute to lawn health. Speed up the decomposition process by mowing the leaves. The small pieces will disappear from our sight within 2 or 3 weeks but the remnants will be contributing to the lawn for the whole year.

If the amount of leaves that fall on your lawn is so deep that it is not possible to mow them and leave them, use them in other ways. Live oak leaves are especially desirable as mulch in flower and vegetable gardens. A layer of two inches makes a good path between plants or rows of plants and they have the capability to slow evaporation, reduce weeds, and keep the soil cool.

Excess leaves can also be used as raw material for the compost pile. Mix them with weeds and other green material to produce compost. Add a few cups of lawn fertilizer spread over the pile to speed up the decomposition.

The least desirable option for your leaves is to bag them for the garbage collection. Everyone loses with that option. The benefit of the organic material is lost and they fill up valuable landfill space. If you can’t find a use for your leaves in your landscape, make them available to your neighbors. Most neighborhoods have one or more gardeners who actively seek out extra leaves. If you don’t know who that is ask around.