

Fertilize the Lawn After Mowing “Real” Grass Twice.

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If your lawn was well tended last summer including irrigation to keep it green through the dry summer and if it receives enough sun to produce a tight sod, it is almost time to fertilize. The brown sod is gradually turning green as the new growth from the St Augustine, zoysia, or Bermuda grass emerges. If this sounds like your lawn grass go ahead and fertilize with a slow release lawn fertilizer such as 19-5-9 or a similar product with 50 % slow release nitrogen as soon as you have mowed the new grass blades twice.

The growing grass indicates that the sod has a root system that has grown extensive enough this spring to collect the available nutrients and also that the translocation mechanisms are functioning enough to pull the nutrients up into the new grass blades and other parts of the plant.

Using a slow-release lawn fertilizer with a 3-1-2 ratio and a relatively high percentage of nitrogen(the first number) means that the growing grass will have a sufficient level of nutrients and in the right proportion to meet the needs of the grass for the spring growth period. Using a slow release product with 50% of the nitrogen released throughout the growing season produces a moderate steady growth rate where most of the nitrogen is efficiently utilized by the lawn.

Several other notes on lawn fertilization issues:

(1) It is not recommended that “Weed and Feed “ mixes be used. In our growing conditions the time to prevent or kill weeds is different from the time to provide nutrients to the lawn grass. Now when it is time to fertilize, the winter weeds are at the end of their life already so applying a weed killer is wasted and environmentally inappropriate. If the product has preemergent properties, it is too late to prevent germination of the summer weeds when the fertilizer works best for the lawn.

(2) Organic lawn fertilizers are 100% slow release and low-level nitrogen sources. To be effective in supporting the normal lawn spring growth spurt, they would have to be applied earlier in the spring to give the products time to release the nitrogen. The nitrogen levels in organic lawn fertilizers are also about one-third as much as the material in manufactured products, so depending on the product, it may work best for the lawn if 3 times as much fertilizer is applied to the grass about March 1 rather than the end of April. Follow the label instructions.

(3) There is also an alternate lawn situation that exists in some neighborhoods. If you are trying to grow a lawn in a shallow soil on a shady site and did not irrigate fastidiously last summer, you may have had a relatively good looking green lawn this winter provided by the winter weeds- rescue grass, annual bluegrass, and/or horseherb. The issue with this special winter lawn is that to keep it looking good you have been mowing it, but it will decline quickly in the heat before any permanent grass such as St Augustine grass takes over. There will be a noticeable period of the weed dieback and lawn browning prior to the permanent grass green-up. Don't be distressed, expect the permanent lawn or summer weeds to green it up.