

Expert advice

on how to have the best lawn on your street

Follow these tips from ClubLink superintendents for a great looking, low-maintenance lawn that leaves you more time for golf

by Matthew Black

Springtime in ClubLink's Ontario/Quebec Region brings many changes; for many Members, it presents a delicate balancing act between trying once again to perfect our golf game and trying to achieve the perfect lawn.

Nobody spends more time doing the latter than ClubLink superintendents. Growing grass is, after all, their passion. The only difference is that their properties are far bigger and more complex than ours. Intricate sprinkler systems and drainage, precise fertilization schedules, expensive equipment and machinery maintenance... all in the name of ensuring that your putts roll dead solid perfect.

However, there are ways ClubLink Members can bring some of that magic from their Home Club, well, home. Here are five tips from some ClubLink golf course superintendents on how to grow, maintain and preserve your lawn.

There's no mystery regarding home lawn care. All that's required is a willingness to learn.

Don't just mow and go

"It's important to spend just as much time thinking about your lawn as it is actually cutting it," says Mike Sturrock, Superintendent at Islesmere in Montreal. "We all get into the habit of mowing the same day every week, but consider weather conditions, location and stresses when deciding how often and how high to cut." Sturrock's suggestion reinforces the importance of analyzing your property and really deciding upon the best way to maintain it.



"Turf can easily be over-fertilized, over-watered and over-cut, either too short or too often" but one thing is for sure—your lawn can never be over-thought. "More frequent mowing when weather conditions allow it helps to encourage lateral growth in your turf which will help prevent weeds throughout the season and create the thick, consistent turf stand you are looking for."

Don't starve your lawn



"Fertilization is the single most important lawn procedure required to improve lawn quality, density, and act as defender of the inevitable weed invasion in today's chemical-free environment," offers Glen Abbey Superintendent Scott Bowman. "A fertilization program should focus on even amounts of nitrogen throughout the year with a strong late fall and dormant plan to properly prepare your lawn for the winter months and upcoming spring."

"Springtime fertilization is something every home owner feels the need to do to get a head start for the upcoming season. However, a lawn that has been put to bed properly will not need any fertilization until May at the earliest. Soil temperatures remain quite low in the spring so an early application is not only a waste of time, but also money. Too much springtime fertilizer can lead to the plant using extra energy for top growth, taking away from root health, which then leads to overall turf failure later in the season."

Bowman emphasizes that your efforts this year will go a long way towards success next year. And for those of you wondering what to do with clippings: Leave them. They can provide up to one-third of the annual feeding requirement your lawn needs. Nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium... they're all in there.

A dirty business

While your grass may appear rich in colour and pure in form, Jeff Allen, Superintendent at The Lake Joseph Club, urges us all to perform a soil test. "You can't have a good lawn without good soil. Taking a sample is simple, and the recommendations are specific regarding which nutrients to add and how much."



Considering many blame poor growth and appearance on sun and humidity, Allen's suggestion is enlightening. A soil test may help determine a deficiency or abundance in your lawn's makeup (www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/resource/soillabs.htm).

"For example," Allen continues, "if your turf quality is poor near the road, it may be a salt issue. In this case, an application of lime in the spring may be advised."

As the spring sunshine makes short work of that final snowfall, many ClubLink Members will be washing their clubs, tightening their spikes, and programming LinkLine back into their speed dials. Armed with these easy-to-implement tips from those who know best—ClubLink's superintendents—you're primed to enjoy a high-quality, low-maintenance lawn.

Water, water, everywhere

Periodic water bans notwithstanding, watering your lawn efficiently is a necessity. GreyHawk Superintendent Chris Brown encourages "infrequent deep watering which is much more beneficial to the plant than frequent shallow watering. Deep watering encourages the plant's roots to drive down deeper in the soil, making the plant more sustainable to drought or weed competition. Grass plants with deep established roots are also more inclined to endure the harsh winter and flourish again come spring."



Your lawn will tell how much water it needs... and when. According to Bowman, "a symptom of a lawn that is getting dry is a little top growth and a lawn colour that goes from green to having a bluish or purple hue. Morning dew patterns are also a convenient water signifier: "A lawn that carries heavy dew is a lawn that needs little water; but if you see strange dew patterns throughout that means you are starting to dry out."

Norm Roberts, Director of Turf Operations at Sun City Center, reminds Members of the importance of accuracy.



"Don't guess how much water your lawn is getting. For measuring Mother Nature's contribution, invest in a rain gauge. If at the end of the week your natural water is not enough, you'll want to add some supplemental water."

How low can you go?

Roberts also has some thoughts on height. "Mowing height is important because the length of the grass blade is the part that absorbs sunshine, which the grass blade then miraculously converts into food." The most suitable cutting height depends on the time of year and weather.

Sturrock advises that "in periods of high stress such as high temperatures, low sun, drought or increased traffic, consider raising the height of cut of your lawn to better allow the plant to survive those conditions. In early spring, when turf is recovering from winter, allow a week or two at a higher mowing height to help speed up recovery, but when things begin to push, do not be shy to bring it back down to around an inch and a half."