



# LawnCareGuide



**LawnCare**Guide

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**Grass needs four essential growth factors:  
sunlight, water, nutrients and air.**

# January

The soil conditions influence all of these except sunlight. The plant takes up water, nutrients and oxygen from the soil. But down at the **roots** carbon dioxide is produced, accumulates and needs to escape to the atmosphere.

'Traffic' across the lawn, walking backwards and forwards, kids playing, pets wandering about all help to **compact the soil**, resulting in **thatch** and organic matter accumulating in the root zone.

Noticed some squelchy patches on the lawn in winter? There's not much to be done for the grass at this time of the year but what you can do is **spiking** and **aerating** to greatly improve **drainage**, using a hollow tine aerator to remove thin plugs of soil. Or you can spike with a garden fork down about 15cm/6" deep.

After spiking a few square metres, brush a dressing of sharp sand into the holes and spread a **top dressing** to help the grass root in the spring. Remember to use only sharp sand and never builder's sand for this.



*Spiking improves drainage*

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*Removing moss by  
scarifying*

***At this time of year, some grass may die back as the lawn starts to grow, creating spongy areas.***

If conditions are mild and dry you can scarify the lawn now to **remove moss** or thatch. Use a **scarifier** attachment with your garden tractor, an electric/powerd scarifier or simply a rake.

# February

Grass roots need oxygen so if you didn't have a chance in January to **aerate** the lawn do so now – a garden fork will do the job or a spiker/aerator attachment on the garden tractor can be used if the ground is not too soft and wet.

For the most part the lawn will keep itself relatively weed free. If it needs a helping hand, you can apply 'lawn sand' which will help **prevent moss** and **daisy growth**.

**Top dressing** helps to improve the soil and there are many brands available. Ideally a combination of loam, sand and peat (or peat alternative) is what you need. Depending on your soil 40% loam, 40% sand and 20% peat or peat alternative will do the job. Just sprinkle about a kilo per square metre over the soil and rake it in. Use a rake too or a lawn brush to scatter worm casts if the conditions are dry.

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**Generally, lawn grasses fall into two groups: narrow leaf, low growing fescue and taller broad leaf types such as rye grass and meadow grass. For lawns that are to be closely mown the fine grasses will be predominant.**

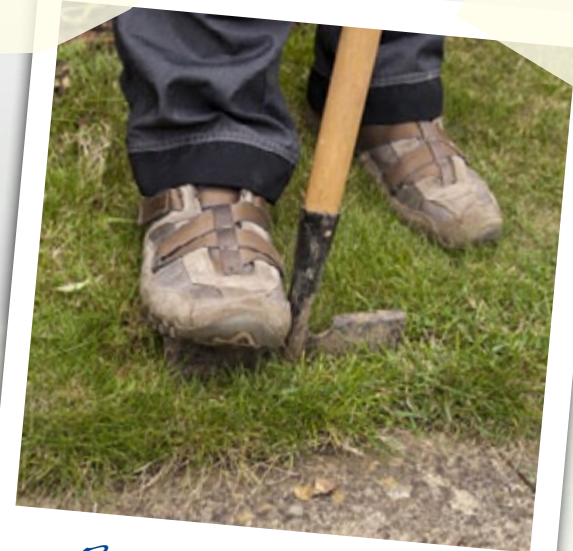
March is the ideal time for **patching up** bare areas by loosening up the soil, mixing a little soil and seed, spreading and then covering the area with some clear polythene. Slit to let in air and water and peg down.

**Lawn edges** can be cut and **repaired** and a top dressing applied if not done in late February. It's probably too early to treat weeds but organic moss killer can be used, raking out **dead moss** and thatch or using a powered scarifier.

# March

The grass can have a **feed** of nitrogenous lawn fertiliser or you can wait a few weeks and apply a weed and feed treatment.

A little warmth may have promoted growth and **mowing** can start but avoid cutting closely. Set the mower to its highest cutting position, lowering with each cut over a few weeks. It's good practice to mow in different directions to pick up longer grass.



*Repairing lawn edges*

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*Mowing begins in earnest in spring*

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***Up until now, much has depended on the weather conditions as far as the lawn is concerned – so this month's tips may repeat some of those given for March.***

**Cutting the grass** usually begins in earnest in April. Mow when the grass is dry. For the first mowing in spring, set the cutting height to the highest setting.

# April

Thereafter, gradually reduce the **height of cut** until the desired height is reached. For fine lawns, this will be 6-13mm (¼-½in). For ordinary ornamental lawns this will be 13-25mm (½-1in) in summer and up to 40mm (1½in) in spring and autumn. You shouldn't take more than a third off the height of the grass at any one mowing.

During winter months the grass may have lifted a little - it may benefit from a **light rolling** if it's dry enough.

Now is the time to **repair** damaged areas not patched in March and apply **seed**, raking the area to let the seed settle. Cutting the grass will reveal any weed and moss problems and these can be treated. Lawn fertilizer and lawn **weed control** products are best applied in April before the weather really warms up, following the manufacturer's instructions. If there are no weeds or moss just use fertilizer.

**Aerate** any areas where the lawn is compacted. If you have prepared a bed for a new lawn, lightly rake it over ready for sowing. If you are laying turf this needs to be completed by the end of the month to give the grass the chance to take root.



Choose a calm, dry day to **treat daisies** and plantain in the lawn. The chemicals slip off the narrow grass leaves but settle on the broad leaves of the weeds and scorch them. Follow the manufacturer's instructions on when and when not to mow during treatment.

Smooth out any depressions in the lawn by **top dressing** with fine soil but don't smother the grass, do it in stages. If you like a **striped lawn** and have a mower with a roller this will help to both flatten the area and show you where you need to fill.



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***A lot of what was said in May about caring for the lawn still applies in June. A new lawn is best started in August to September, so continue to prepare the area and complete any deep cultivation.***

Give existing lawns the last treatment of **lawn sand** and weed killers that destroy broad leaf weeds.

**Watering** can be important but with hosepipe bans and periods of drought you need to do what you can to help the grass. Whilst reasonably **drought** tolerant, prolonged dry periods will make the ground hard and difficult for water to penetrate.

**Spiking** will help, as will **mulching** by raising the mower blades in dry weather and instead of collecting the grass, leaving it as moist cuttings to act as protection. A purpose-built mulching deck on a garden tractor will be just the job.

# June

Fine fescue and bent grasses that make the finest lawns are less susceptible to dry weather. When you do water, water well. Give the lawn a **good soaking** a couple of times a week rather than light spraying every day, as too little will only lead to shallow rooting and encourage weed.

Keep **edges** trimmed for a neat appearance using a powered edger or attachment for your trimmer if you have one. Continue to mow regularly but keeping the above in mind.



*Mulching helps retain moisture in the lawn*

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*Hot, dry summers can  
create lawn problems*

***The summer has been hot and dry, you have done everything you should with the lawn, followed the watering regime and yet your manicured lawn is turning brown.***

If this sounds familiar it may be that the original soil preparation was poor and **frequent mowing** hasn't helped. Mow less frequently, set the mower or deck to leave the grass 2.5cm (1") high and don't collect the grass, leave the cuttings as a **mulch** on the lawn where they will return nutrients and humus to the soil. Ideally a mulching mower or mulching deck on a garden tractor will do the job of chopping the cuttings very finely.

## July

Established lawns may benefit from application of a little light granular **fertiliser**, followed by watering if it's dry or apply just before rain falls. Come autumn you can add some organic matter to the soil by spiking and aerating and then brushing in fine garden compost. This will help to retain moisture at the roots.

Weed as necessary if you find **weeds** developing. Remove them before they can seed and cause problems next year. Another 'weed and feed' application in the autumn will help deal with this as well, treating for moss and clover.

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**Preparing to sow or turf a lawn: What do you want to use the lawn for? If the kids are going to play football on it you'll need a tough, rye grass mixture. If you want the finest grass it will need lots of attention.**

Creeping grasses will be mixed with tufted grass for better cover and wear resistance. Broad leaved grasses such as perennial rye can be **mixed** with narrow leaved fescue for a stronger turf that needs little attention.

**Good preparation** is the key to a great lawn and begins by digging the area a spade deep, removing perennial weeds and their roots as you go.

# August

**Tough weeds** like ground elder can be sprayed with herbicide – glyphosate will leave no harmful residues in the soil.

Coarse **grit** mixed with the soil will aid drainage and a good helping of manure will be a real benefit. **Levelled** and **raked** the soil can be left for a couple of weeks and any weeds that appear can be picked off or treated with herbicide. Then, in the manner of great gardeners, **tread** the whole area firmly in your boots, rake and check levels, tread again and when you're happy you can **sow or turf** in September.

Turf can be laid straight onto the level soil after growing weeds have been dug out. Weed seeds will be smothered by the turves. Stagger the turves in **alternate rows** and beat them firmly onto the soil with the back of a spade. Brush fine, sifted, soil into any cracks.



*Rolls of turf*

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*Thatch can build up in the soil*

**Early autumn care for the lawn is helped by an understanding of what's been happening beneath the surface.**

A summer of walking, playing and generally using the lawn has caused the soil to **compact** which prevents air reaching the roots. Some of the grass has gone through the natural life-cycle and has died. **Fresh grass** is germinating from seed in the soil or windblown seed.

Use of fertilizer and the presence of **moss** join these other factors in the build-up of **thatch**, the dead growth at soil level. It needs to be removed if you are to have a healthy lawn next year.

September is the ideal time for **scarification**, the removal of thatch and moss. The thatch can't break down by itself and it creates the ideal conditions for disease, preventing air and nutrients from reaching the grass roots. It also becomes an ideal home for insects and chokes any fresh growth. So you need to scarify and remove most of the thatch.

First though, you need to **mow the lawn** quite short, dropping the mower cutting height or the height of the cutting deck on a garden tractor. This is best done over two or three mowings. Then you can scarify with a powered scarifier or one that uses the Power Take-Off on the garden tractor.

# September

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*Depending on the weather, mowing the lawn will be dwindling. Some weather systems may create a late 'Indian summer' when the grass just refuses to stop growing. Don't cut too low if you do need to cut.*

# October

Of course **leaves** will be coming down and need clearing off the lawn. A power **blower** or vacuum is just the job, or **collecting** with the grass box and sweeper on a garden tractor will deal swiftly with each fall.

**Scarify** the lawn if not already done in the previous month. **Spiking** will help water drain away and relieve compaction. Turf can be laid for new lawns or to repair worn patches on old ones. Stagger turves side by side so they bind together as the roots take hold.

Manually **raking** with a spring toothed garden rake will help to remove any **moss** not cut away with the scarifier. A towed rake will do the job a lot faster. If moss is present, this could be due to drought, **poor drainage**, compaction, shade, starvation or even very close mowing. For a quick solution, a proprietary moss killer can be used and the moss raked out after a couple of weeks. **Worm casts** should be distributed with a birch brush or lawn brush.



*Collecting leaves quickly with a Shred 'n' Vac*

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*Clearing leaves is easy  
with a garden tractor*

***It's easy to forget the lawn this month as mowing is pretty well finished (some late summers have seen mowing into late November depending on your location).***

If there's frost on the lawn it's best to keep off the grass to save any damage but if it warms up finish **clearing up leaves** and get control over any **moss** and worm casts.

If you have finished mowing why not get the lawn mower or garden tractor in for a **service** – leave it too late and you could get caught out next year.

## November

**Edges** can be trimmed up and any overhanging shrubs pruned back. An application of autumn and winter **fertiliser** will benefit the lawn and bare areas can still be seeded. It's still a good time to **lay turf** for a new lawn unless the ground is frozen or too wet to walk on.

If the ground was correctly prepared in August to September it should only need any weed removed with a hoe and then the surface raked and a little fertiliser added before laying the turves. You probably won't need to water unless it is particularly dry.

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***Snow can damage your lawn as it shuts out light and causes the leaves to yellow. It also prevents air circulation and the drying effect of the wind.***

# December

Result: there is a lot **more moisture** to be absorbed and the lawn is more susceptible to fungal disease.

**Spiking** and **aerating** in earlier months will have had a beneficial effect and indeed, spiking can be done as the snow clears if the ground is not too frozen. Treatment with some high potassium (K) **fertiliser** will help.

Time to **clean up the mower** and put it away or get the garden tractor serviced if you didn't book it in last month.

Leather jackets, crane fly or daddy long legs larva feed on grass roots just below the soil. They also attract moles and you may notice increased bird activity. You can deal with this in a snowless December by applying a **pesticide** and there are organic treatments if that is your preferred route.



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