

## **Best advice for your lawn: now's time to leave it alone!**

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Spring doesn't officially begin until March 21, but, this year, with so many trees in full bloom, many folks think spring is here and are anxious to get started on their lawns.

Our cold winter has left most lawns in the area really brown, many with some patches of green weeds. After a few warm days it's, only natural for us to want our lawns to turn green and look good again. We've had many requests for help on speeding up the process.

Unfortunately, there's not much you can do right now to help: In fact, if you act too soon you can damage your lawn. Enjoy the beautiful warm weather and blooming trees, but leave the lawn care for another day later in the season.

More cold weather may be coming. A frost can be expected as late as mid-April. The best answer we can give you at this time- is to be patient and do nothing. Give your lawn time to break dormancy and recover from the cold.

A lot depends on how healthy your lawn was at the beginning of winter. If you fertilized too late in the fall, the new growth may not have had time to harden before the first freeze. If your grass has been kept cut too short, the roots didn't get a chance to store enough carbohydrates to protect them from the cold.

Even if you ended last season with a healthy lawn, our cold, dry winter may have caused some damage. It will take a while for your lawn to get started, in the spring. Soil temperatures must rise and new root growth start before the top growth can take off. The winter weeds will start to die out and damaged spots will begin to fill in. Try to hold off until your help is really, needed. Too much attention now could harm your lawn.

Now that you have been told what not to do, let's talk about what you should do...

Every lawn has different requirements, so I can't really tell you exactly what to do without knowing more about your unique situation, but I can tell you what plan to do with my front lawn.

Ever since becoming a Master Gardener some 10 years ago I have followed the advice of David Marshall, Leon County's Horticultural Extension Agent. While my lawn may not be a showplace, it is easy to maintain and always looks nice.

**Fertilizing:** I do not plan to Fertilize until early April, after the lawn has turned green. I will use a 16-4-8 or 15-0-15 grade fertilizer with half of the nitrogen in a slow-release form. I will use no more than six pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet of lawn. I will then lightly water the fertilizer in.

**Watering:** After the first watering, will not water again until the lawn shows signs of wilt. For example, when you see your footprints after you have walked across the grass. At that time, I will water long enough to deliver 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch of water to the lawn. This will continue to be my watering schedule for the rest of the growing season:

**Weeding:** I don't worry about weeds. Any weeds in the lawn now are cool-season weeds and will die out when the weather turns hot. Until then I just regularly mow them down along with the grass. I have not used an herbicide on my lawn in years. If you feel you need one, be very careful. Improper use of a herbicide has

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ruined a lot of Tallahassee lawns.

**Fungus:** The presence of fungus is usually a sign of too much water. Fortunately, I haven't had, to use a fungicide. I attribute that to good drainage and following the watering schedule described earlier. Do not use a fungicide unless you see signs of an active disease. Unless the disease is active the fungicide will do no good.

**Mowing:** This is probably the most important thing I learned from David about lawn care. I keep my grass mowed to the maximum height recommended. My lawn is St. Augustine grass and I do not mow it tighter than 3 inches deep. This produces a healthier root system, helps the lawn survive drought periods, and --- best of all -- keeps the weeds out.

So be patient, let nature take its course and don't step in until you are needed.

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