

The 5 Secrets To A Great Looking Lawn

by Gerry Faehrmann

Lawn Green Pty Ltd
7 Elliott Place Cherrybrook NSW 2126 Australia

Thank you for taking the time to find out the **The 5 Secrets To A Great Looking Lawn.**

You know that everyone we meet for the first time just dreams of that perfect lawn: lush, green, and oh so beautiful to walk on!

However, while the goal of a lush green lawn is within reach, the lawn lover will require some basic knowledge and understanding of the principles of Lawn and Turf management.

You are most probably thinking "a bit of watering here and there, and maybe mow the lawn a bit more frequently" and that should do it.

Not so...you actually need to consider things like: what sort of turf grass is best suited for your home, when and how often do you water the lawn, how long do you water the lawn (if indeed, do you water the lawn at all), how often and how high should you cut your turf grass, what sort of weeding and feeding program do you implement over the year.

Lots of things to consider...

What we would like to share with you are the 5 hot tips for a great looking lawn!

Truly, with these 5 tips you will be on your way to a perfect lawn - that is, a greener weed free lawn forever!

If you need help turning your tired old grass into lush green lawn, please call us on 1300 55 74 72 for a FREE quote, or visit us at www.LawnGreen.com.au and register online for a FREE quote.

Correct Watering Tips

The first Lawn Care tip is all about the correct watering of your lawn.

Anyone living in the Australian climate is aware to some degree of the importance of water in the pursuit of their dream lawn.

Although there is some awareness regarding the importance of careful water consumption, most people usually have it wrong when it comes to correct watering regimes for their lawns and gardens.

Since the introduction of water restrictions in most of the Australian states (provinces) and with an increased awareness of water shortages, most people have not been clearly educated about effective water use particularly with the care of their lawns.

Note: When referring to lawns in the Australian environment, we are generally talking about warm season turf grasses (such as couch turf grass or Bermuda grass, kikuyu, zoysia, buffalo turf grass or St Augustine, and durban). However, in the cooler climates of the Northern Hemisphere, the lawns that would feature more predominantly are your cool season turf grasses (such as Perennial Rye grass, Creeping bentgrass, Tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass).

Generally, lawn and turf grasses have different water needs than garden plants. Lawns need heavy but infrequent watering, whereby garden plants generally need more frequent and usually lighter watering.

We tell our clients that lawns only need be watered in extreme dry conditions, say once a week in summer, and once a month in winter. Lawns do require heavy but infrequent watering. By heavy watering the moisture travels deep into the soil profile, allowing the turf grass roots to establish to a depth of 200-300mm deep.

With deep root growth, (warm season) turf grasses become **drought tolerant**. As the heavy but infrequent watering is already mimicked by the rainfall, we then tell our clients there is little to no need to water their lawns.

In cooler climates such as in the United Kingdom and United States, lawn watering regimes are different as the preferred turf grasses are generally cool season turf grasses (such as rye, tall fescue, Kentucky blue grass). As the root systems of your cool season turf grasses are shorter, their water needs are different. Cool season turf grasses require more frequent and shallower waterings particularly in the warmer months of the Australian climate.

Other watering tips:

- Water in early morning so by early morning the turf grass dries out, and less chance of fungal disease and minimal evaporation
- Water at intervals, if lawn soil is hydrophobic or really dry, until you get soil moisture correct again

The Right Nutrients

Did you know that your lawn in its natural state would be around a metre high and really untidy?

It is unnatural for the lawn plant (whether it be couch, fescue or durban turf grass) to be cut or mowed! Also, did you know that your lawn is placed under a tremendous amount of stress just by mowing it?

So, in the pursuit of the perfect lawn it is helpful to know that the regular mowing of the lawn is quite an unnatural and stressful event for the lawn. So to counter this stress and hardship, we need to provide our "green oasis" with a good supply of food.

The quickest way to a beautiful lawn every year is by fertilizing your lawn. By feeding your lawn you create a thick lush turf grass that outperforms weeds. All lawns need to be supplemented with the proper nutrients to enable healthy turf growth and to counter any competition for food by other plant life including weeds and trees.

So, to help the lawn overcome the unnecessary stress it undergoes with mowing, it makes a great deal of sense to bump up the lawn's food intake.

Firstly, you need to work out the amount of fertiliser required for your lawn. Simply work out the lawn AREA by calculating the Length and Width of the different Lawn areas. This may be worked out by adding up the sum of the areas of rectangles or triangles that form the total area of your lawn. Another way to calculate an irregular shaped lawn is to take the whole house lot area and subtract the areas of your house and non-lawn areas.

All fertilizer bags or buckets will be labelled to tell you how much fertilizer you need to apply to your lawn. Good fertiliser products are labelled correctly, and are made up of the right ingredients necessary for a great looking lawn.

Warm season turf grasses respond nicely to being fertilized in Spring, Summer and Autumn (Fall). The fertiliser types generally used by Lawn Green are slow release fertilizer products that last up to 13 weeks. Hence, our applications are timed according to the growing seasons.

Cool season turf grasses will require feeding all year round including winter.

The fertilizer products promoted and used by Lawn Green are professional products (and are only commercially available). They are not available to retail or end users such as homeowners. We only recommend some brands of fertilisers sold in hardware stores or nurseries.

Other tips regarding lawn fertilization:

1. Lawns can be over fed, so it is important to follow instructions. Over fertilization of lawns can lead to thatchy lawns.
2. High quality fertilizers are made with slow release technology. You will pay more for this feature. Fertilisers with slow release granules provide the lawn with a steady dose of nutrients resulting in more uniform and controlled growth. This also means less mowing for you!
3. Fertilisers without the slow release technology can burn your turf grass if applied without being heavily watered in.

4. Good lawn fertilisers contain the right blend NPK (nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium) and trace elements. A lawn fertiliser with an NPK of approximately 22:1:4 is a good lawn fertiliser for established lawns. NPK's of a lower N (around 15) and higher P (around 5) are good for new turf establishment.
5. If you have a fertilizer spill while applying, act fast and scoop or vacuum up as much fertilizer as possible. Then flood the spill site with water. This will reduce the effects of the spill and help promote a speedy recovery.
6. Best tool for distributing granular fertilizer for your home lawn is with a Hand-held Spreader. These are best for smaller lawn areas that are bounded by gardens and paved areas.
7. The best and most accurate way to spread the fertilizer is by setting the Hand held spreader on a low setting and evenly distribute the granular fertilizer. Once you get proficient at this you can set it at a higher setting to distribute the granules faster. The most important goal while spreading is to lay down the fertilizer in the most uniform manner possible. You can achieve this by following straight paths at a uniform speed and keeping turns to a minimum. Making sure to overlap is the key to avoiding streaks and stripes from unfertilized areas.
8. The other spreaders you can use are rotary spreaders and drop spreaders. Rotary spreaders are best for large areas because they spread quickly. Drop spreaders are a bit more precise and better for smaller areas where you want to avoid fertilizing adjacent areas such as flower beds.
9. Here is a quick trick to determine exactly how much of your fertilizer is slow-releasing: divide the percentage of slowly-available nitrogen by the percentage of water soluble nitrogen then multiply by 100%. For example, by calculating $(5\% / 9\%) * 100\%$, which equals 55.5%. This means the fertilizer contains 55% slow release nitrogen.
10. After fertilising your lawn, you can mow the lawn for 1 or 2 cuts without the lawnmower catcher to prevent sucking up or vacuuming any of the fertilizer granules.

NOTE: You might be thinking that all this fertilising is a bit unnatural, and that it compromises Organic Lawn Care philosophy. Don't forget that the art of lawn mowing is unnatural and stressful, and proper compensations need to be made to have the "perfect lawn".

In the lawn we crowd as many as forty to sixty individual plants into a square foot of turf. As these plants struggle to survive under these conditions of intense competition, we further complicate the lawn plants' existence by cutting away the healthiest, most vigorous part of the leaf, that is, the young tip.

We do this not to make things hard for the plant, but because we are trying to force a low, compact, artificially dwarfed habit of growth, entirely different from the natural upright habit of these species. They grow 30 to 40 inches tall in the wild or in a meadow. These factors add up to an environment in which the individual plant is suppressed to produce a beautiful lush green (mowed) lawn. However, the suppressed turf grass can be maintained as a beautiful lush green (mowed) lawn, if you, the lawn lover maintains an artificial regime of feeding and all the other things needed.

The Correct Mowing Height & Frequency

To ensure you never ever scalp your lawn, only ever remove less than one-third of the turf grass leaf.

It is important to mow your lawn frequently. In the event you have to mow your lawn after a long period, make sure you only remove a third of the leaf. The next time you mow, remove another third of the leaf, and so on, until you have the lawn at the desired height.

The following list of turf grasses can be cut to the corresponding optimal heights:

- Buffalo (St Augustine) - mow to 45-55mm high
- Hybrid Couch (Bermuda Grass) - mow to 15-35mm high
- Durban (Sweet Smother) - mow to 50-75mm high
- Kikuyu - mow to 25-45mm high
- Queensland Blue Couch - mow to 25-45mm high
- Tall Fescue - mow to 50-75mm high
- Zoysia - mow to 25-55mm high

As mentioned above you need to mow your lawn frequently. Besides looking good, your lawn becomes thick and dense with regular or frequent lawn mowing. If you have damaged areas, the best thing apart from fertilizing the lawn is to mow regularly as this speeds up the lateral growth of the lawn.

Some lawn lovers like to mow their lawn (mainly couch, or the couch equivalent in North America known as Bermuda grass) with a cylinder lawnmower. Besides the golf green appearance, the main benefit of mowing with a cylinder mower is your lawn will have zero thatch.

However, if you are not wealthy enough to own a cylinder mower, you can achieve excellent and similar results with a rotary lawn mower (for all turf grass types). Simply mow the lawn in different directions each time you mow. So one week you might mow in north-south direction, the next time in a south-north direction, the next time in an east-west direction and then the next week in a west-east direction.

One way of eliminating a bad thatch problem in some lawn types (really this only applies to kikuyu and couch turf grasses due to the way they are built, that is, with both above ground runners, the stolons, and below ground runners, the rhizomes) is by scalping your lawn (or cutting it really low) in say mid to late Spring or in Summer. Once you have cut the lawn back hard, then fertilise and water heavily (and frequently) to bring on new growth. When your lawn has grown back to around 25-30mm high maintain the lawn mowing on a regular basis from this point forward.

This method is a great way to eliminate a bad thatch problem in your kikuyu or couch lawns as you save on having to pay a lawn professional to scarify or comb your lawn with a lawn scarifier. However, if your lawn is buffalo turf grass (or the buffalo equivalent in North America known as St Augustine turf grass) then you will need to scarify your lawn properly. The reason here is that buffalo turf grass (also, the same with Queensland Blue couch) is built only with

stolons or above ground runners. If you cut buffalo too short you risk losing or killing your turf grass.

If your lawn is surrounded by deciduous trees, conifers, casuarinas (river she oaks), melaleuca trees and pine trees you will find the lawn will die back underneath or around these trees. The tree leaves and needles are high in acid content. When these break down in the soil, the soil pH becomes more acidic and therefore, unfavourable for healthy lawn growth. The best way to counter this is by mowing (with a catcher) every week all year round. This way you collect all the tree leaves and needles.

Some of these tree types also have aggressive root systems that drain the soil's moisture.

Some of you may be tempted just to rake these tree leaves and needles. This is not good, as the raking makes it hard for the lawn turf runners to stabilize and root down.

Dealing With Lawn Pests Including Weeds And Insects

We all know someone who blames their sad and sorry lawn on the neighbour's weed infested jungle.

What people need to understand is, that by creating the right conditions and by implementing the right Lawn Care practices, anyone can have a perfect lawn.

In the previous tips, we talk about proper watering, mowing and feeding of the lawn. If these things are implemented correctly, then you are well on the way to a greener, weed free lawn.

It is important to remind lawn lovers that weeds differ according:

1. to the time of year they flourish or when they tend to germinate (that is, winter or summer weeds - otherwise known as annual weeds)
2. the type of plant they are, that is, broadly either grassy weeds or broadleaf weeds

Annual weeds, by nature, germinate from seed, grow into a plant, flower and finally spread their seed for the next season. So we can control this process by implementing correct watering, mowing and feeding regimes.

What do we do if there are existing weeds in the lawn? There is a range of measures that can be implemented:

1. Mechanical weed control - hand remove weeds
2. Cultural weed control - correct watering, mowing and feeding programs
3. Chemical weed control - apply either selective or non-selective herbicides to lawn weeds

Depending on the type of target weed (whether grassy or broadleaf) and the lawn turf grass type will determine what herbicide can be used. Make sure to CHECK the label for instructions on how to correctly use the product.

Tip: Spray herbicides at correct rate. Incorrect herbicide spraying can be a problem if you overlap the spraying (too zealous with weed spraying), which leads to disappointment with leaf burn or lawn death.

The liquid Weed and Feed products are at times not recommended as:

1. the best time to control weeds is not necessarily the correct time to be fertilizing
2. it is unnecessary to spray the whole lawn when only a small area is infested with weeds
3. it is hard to prevent spray drift of herbicidal chemicals (think safety to children, pets and plants)
4. over zealous spraying leads to leaf burn or die back
5. inconsistent application results in swathes of green across the lawn

An alternative to the "weed and feed products" is to fertilise all your lawn areas, and then apply herbicides and pesticides where and when needed.

What about Lawn Pests such as curl grub, bill bug, army worm or sod web worm? There are a range of pesticides available from retail outlets that will assist in Lawn insect control. Generally,

these products are available in liquid form. Their success is limited as they tend to photo-degrade with sunlight. For best results, apply these products at evening time (with some light about to help you see where you are applying the product).

Lawn Renovation Tips

Lawn can be quickly renovated using all the following techniques and tips:

1. Lawn Aeration

Lawns suffer badly if the lawn's soil is hard as a rock - no question about this!.

Soil compaction makes it difficult for water, fertilizer, air and your turf grass roots to penetrate through the soil. Things that make your lawn soil compacted are parking your motor vehicles on the grass (just don't even think about doing this!), general pedestrian traffic and so on.

So it's really important we remedy or reverse soil compaction! The only way this can be done properly is by physically removing soil from the lawn.

Lawn aeration (also known as lawn coring or plugging) is a process in which a lawn aerating machine pulls small plugs of soil (about the size your finger) from the lawn. These are left on the surface where they will break down in a couple of weeks. Golf course greens keepers use this process several times a year to keep their courses in top playing condition. Lawns grown in clay soils should have this done at least once a year.

Some people may recommend the aerating spike shoes, but really all you are doing with these apart from poking some holes in the soil is just shifting the compaction problem. Although with these you are allowing air into soil, you are not relieving any compaction.

By physically removing plugs of soil from the lawn you reduce soil compaction and thatch in lawns while helping water and fertilizer move into the root zone.

Lawns should be thoroughly watered the day or days before aerating so plugs can be pulled more deeply and easily. Mark all sprinkler heads, shallow irrigation lines and cable TV lines before aerating so those lines will not be damaged.

Lawns may be fertilized and seeded immediately after aeration. There is no need to top dress lawns following aeration.

By coring the lawn you are exposing the soil profile to the atmosphere and air, and thereby making the soil dry. So it is important to keep the water up to the lawn in the next couple of weeks until the lawn has recovered.

Core aeration can be used to minimize thatch accumulation, to modify its physical characteristics, and to reduce soil compaction. Soil plugs are deposited on the turf surface. These plugs then break down and redistribute soil throughout the thatch layer. The soil from the plugs helps to modify the physical structure of the thatch, making it a better growing medium.

This soil also enhances thatch breakdown by introducing the beneficial microorganisms that feed on thatch.

Will your lawn benefit from Lawn Aeration? Always! Generally, we recommend lawn aeration every year or two.

Benefits of Lawn Green's Lawn Aeration and Coring:

1. Relieves soil compaction
2. Increases water infiltration
3. Stimulates new root development, and fresh root growth similar to re-potting plants
4. Improves turf thickness, vigor, and overall health
5. Provides better fertilizer penetration into the root zone
6. Increases air penetration into soil which increases soil microbe activity
7. Increased microbe activity breaks down thatch
8. Enhanced thatch breakdown
9. Decreases water requirements for healthy turf
10. Enhanced heat and drought stress tolerance
11. Reduces water puddling and runoff
12. Improves fertiliser uptake
13. Improves air exchange
14. Finally, it promotes a greener, weed free lawn

Another tip: If your lawn soil is heavy with clay (and compacted), you can introduce washed river sand to the lawn (after coring), brush it into the lawn and fill up core holes with sand.

2. Topdressing

There is really no great benefit derived from topdressing your lawn apart from trying to get your lawn perfectly level (that is, to remove any lumps and bumps in your lawn).

So, what we tell our clients to do is to buy a bag or two of washed river sand (store these in the garage), and as you need to (over the spring & summer period) just fill in the undulations in your lawn. You will have your lawn looking like a bowling green in no time!

But what about turf underlay or topdressing soil we hear you ask? Like we said just stick with the washed river sand, as the turf grass runners will travel through the sand without trouble unlike your topdressing soil that goes rock hard in the summer heat.

3. Liming

Core Aeration is one of the best ways to maintain a healthy soil in which your lawn can thrive. This is also a great time to add lime to 'sweeten' your soil.

For lawns to thrive, it is important to maintain the proper pH of your soil. An improper soil pH can cause some nutrients to become unavailable to the plant. Correct pH will enable your lawn to make best use your lawn applications and ensure your lawn reaches its full potential.

Most lawns grow best in a slightly acidic soil, at a pH of 5.5 to 6.5. As many soils along the eastern seaboard of Australia have a low pH, lime can be applied to help 'sweeten' the soil and correct pH imbalances.

Whilst Lime can be applied at any time of the year, applying in spring/ summer is ideal and is best done with core aeration.

4. Correct Lawn Types

In cool climates the choice of turf grasses is generally limited to cool season turf grasses such as rye grass, fescue and so on.

In more temperate climates, the choice of warm season turf grasses is more extensive.

Nowadays, the home owner is able to choose from a wide range of turf grasses with different colours and textures.

The two (2) critical elements that provide a challenge for most turf grasses are availability of water and sunlight. We can control the input of water, however, not so for areas that do not receive much sunlight. Homeowners can enjoy a "green oasis" even where the lawn does not receive a lot of sunlight.

Turf selection based on shade tolerance is not limited to rye and fescue. Warm season turf grasses such as buffalo and Durban may satisfy your need for a shade tolerant turf grass.

If you need help turning your tired old grass into lush green lawn, please call us on 1300 55 74 72 for a FREE quote, or visit us at www.LawnGreen.com.au and register online for a FREE quote.