

Winter's Wrath On Turf

Identifying and Managing Spring Lawn Issues

BY PATRICK KILKENNY | PHOTOS COURTESY OF LANDSCAPE LOGIC – CHARLEVOIX, MI

The harsh winter season is hard on turf grass for various reasons – especially winters like the one we just had. Heavy snow, cold temperatures, strong winds, and animal damage all take quite a toll on lawns. Due to this season's record breaking snow load and unrelenting bitter cold temperatures, landscape professionals are expecting to see extensive damage to landscape material throughout Michigan. This article is aimed to help identify and manage common springtime turf issues in our region with maintenance now, and preparation this fall.

Fertilizer

First and foremost, the easiest way to keep your lawn healthy and ready for the spring is to use a complete fertilizer in the fall. Be sure to remove leaves and other landscape debris before applying fertilizer to make sure that the grass has the opportunity to uptake and store as many nutrients as possible for the severe winter months.

Fertilizer should always be following proper soil testing to assist with potential pH and nutrient deficiencies. Contact a landscape professional for assistance with proper timing and application rates for fertilizers.

Leaf and Landscape Debris Cleanup

Buildup of fallen leaves and other landscape debris can provide a perfect environment for diseases and pests to hide and grow. Removal of leaves in the fall and again in early spring will help control these items throughout the growing season.

Accumulation of leaves and other debris can also kill the turf grass underneath by not allowing the proper amount of sunlight, water, and air circulation to the grass below. If you do notice disease

or pests during your spring and fall cleanups, remove the debris from the infected area and be sure to clean tools and other equipment before moving on to healthy portions of the landscape.

Plow Damage

Once the snowbanks recede, snow plow damage is easily identified by the presence of rolled sod pieces and debris in heavily plowed areas. If the turf has been damaged by a plow, generally all that needs to be done is removal of the sod pieces and overseeding with new grass seed.

Installing plow markers in the fall is helpful in locating the edges of the driveway or walkway and can help to reduce damage to turf in the spring. Try to choose bright and reflective markers to assist with visibility during the dark winter months.

Aerate and Overseed

The winter season is typically very harsh on turf grass. Aerating your lawn in the spring relieves soil compaction and increases the availability of oxygen, nutrients and water to the roots. Core aeration is also very helpful if you are planning to overseed the lawn. Core aeration provides the seed with a proper surface to establish, and also put nutrients back into the soil as they decompose.

Spring is the optimal time for grass seed germination. Warm days and cool nights, along with the typical spring rain, provide some of the best environment "s" for turf grass. Contact a landscape professional for assistance with proper timing and application rates of different turf grass seed types. Be sure to adjust your irrigation accordingly in the spring to account for potential wet weather. Overwatering can be harmful to your turf and may increase the chances of fungal disease.

GRUB DAMAGE



Grubs

Grubs damage can generally be identified by the presence of dead patches in the lawn; animals and birds digging at the lawn can also be a sign of grubs. The grub damaged turf generally pulls up in large chunks and is missing its root system. Grubs overwinter deep in the soil and feed in the spring on the roots of healthy turf, and generally move concentrically out from the center of the dead patch. You may be able to find live grubs feeding around the edges where the dead and healthy grass areas meet.

Apply insecticides according to the directions on the label and time of year to reduce the grub population. Contact a landscape professional for assistance with proper timing and application rates with commercial pesticides. Rake out dead patches and apply grass seed to reestablish turf. Lawn aeration and fertilizer will also be helpful in establishing quality turf. Note: do not use fertilizer with herbicide (ex. Weed & Feed) on newly planted grass seed as the herbicide could be harmful to newly established seed.

Disease

Various types of lawn diseases are common in the spring months. Each disease has different characteristics but almost all show some sort of discoloration of the turf. Fungal diseases such as Snow Mold may be found in the spring and can generally be treated with fungicides and raking out the damaged areas. The type of product needed is based on the disease and treatment should be applied according to the directions on the label.

Fungal diseases arise for various reasons including, but not limited to: lack of oxygen to root systems (improve with aeration), too much shade and moisture (improve by thinning tree canopy and adjusting irrigation), and accumulation of fallen leaves and other debris (improve with removal and disposal). Correcting these and other contributing issues will help in developing and keeping a quality lawn from season to season.

SNOW MOLD



Voiles

Vole damage can typically be identified by depressed, tunnel-like veins running throughout the lawn. Voiles can be removed using both lethal and non-lethal methods. To prevent vole damage, install tamperproof bait boxes in the fall to overwinter and help decrease damaged turf in the spring. Contact a landscape professional for assistance with proper timing and application of rodent controls.

To repair vole damage, the tunnel areas need to be brought back to original grade and have the dead or damaged grass raked then overseeded to reestablish turf. As with any overseeding project, fertilizer with herbicide (ex. Weed & Feed) is not recommended on newly planted grass seed.

VOLE DAMAGE



Crabgrass and Broadleaf Weed Prevention

Early spring application of crabgrass pre-emergent with fertilizer helps to prevent the germination of crabgrass in turf in late summer. Landscape professionals use soil temperature readings to plan for timely applications prior to crabgrass germination.

Broadleaf weeds also pop up in the spring. Treat actively growing broadleaf species (clover, dandelion, thistle, etc.) with selective broadleaf control. Proper fertilization will boost turf growth and help it to thicken for a healthier lawn. Contact a landscape professional for assistance with proper timing and application rates.

Dethatching

Removing thatch when it becomes over half an inch thick is helpful in controlling disease throughout the lawn. If it is allowed to accumulate, thatch can become harmful to turf grass by providing an area for disease to proliferate, as well as not allowing for proper air and oxygen circulation. Small amounts of thatch are ideal because it is also helpful in keeping the turf cool and providing an area for nutrients to be held and slowly break down into the soil.

Creating and maintaining a healthy lawn in Northern Michigan is difficult, time consuming, and sometimes utterly confusing work. Extreme winters like the one we experienced this season will surely have an adverse effect on even the healthiest turf grass. In many cases, starting from square one with a pair of gloves, a rake, and a load of determination may be the best plan of action for getting your lawn back into shape this spring season.

Many of the lawn care products and tools required to help you along the way are available at local lawn and garden centers. However, there are various useful, and many times necessary, materials and equipment that will need to be used and applied by a landscape professional with proper licensing and credentials. □

Here's to a healthy crop of turf grass this season.

Happy mowing!



As a top lender serving all of lower Michigan, Lake Michigan Credit Union is here to help you make your dreams a reality.

Grand Rapids (616) 242-9790 • Kalamazoo (269) 978-6120
Lakeshore (616) 234-6568 • Traverse City (231) 941-6560
Saginaw (989) 792-9081 • Farmington Hills/Livonia (734) 462-5400
LMCU.org/Mortgage

