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Getting your lawn in gear for fall

The summer stress from insects and diseases can take a toll on any lawn, making autumn the time when a lawn can naturally repair itself.

“With the warmer soil, cooler air temperatures and the natural increases in rainfall the season brings, the conditions are ideal for new seed to germinate quickly, become established and fill in any bare areas that may have developed,” says Ryan Leland, owner of Spring-Green Lawn Care in



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Ryan Leland

Kenmore. “It may sound easy but certain precautions must be taken to ensure your lawn is ready when temperatures start to dip.” Here are some

tips from Leland on the best way to revive a damaged lawn:

- **Aerate Away:** One of the best ways to reseed an existing lawn is to first core aerate the lawn. Your lawn care professional will use a machine to remove plugs of soil and thatch and deposit them back on top of the lawn to allow for more air, water and

nutrients to penetrate into the root zone to help develop a stronger root system. The cores that are left behind will dissolve back into the lawn and help breakdown any thatch that has developed. For maximum effectiveness, the lawn should have adequate moisture to allow the aeration machine to penetrate the soil more easily.

- **Seed, Seed and More Seed:** Because seed needs contact with soil to germinate, just spreading seed over a non-aerated lawn will not produce the desired results. Broadcasting seed over a newly aerated lawn, however,

allows for better soil-seed contact and better germination. One key advantage of seeding after core aerating is that the seed that falls into the holes will be protected and remain moist longer and provide better germination. As the soil collapses within the hole, the new plants will rise to ground level with a stronger, deeper root system.

- **Water, Water Everywhere:** Aeration and seeding alone won't repair a lawn; in fact, one of the main reasons seed doesn't germinate is due to inadequate watering. Depending on the variety of seed being used, germination rates can vary. For example, it can take anywhere for five to seven days for perennial rye grass or Tall Fescue

and up to three weeks for bluegrass. Keeping the lawn frequently watered for two to four weeks or longer will ensure the new seed becomes well established. Be careful, though, because watering just enough to get the seed to germinate and then stopping will only result in the death of the new grass plants.

- **Don't Forget Food Before A Long Winter's Nap:** This is a time of year when your lawn can really chow down and make quick and good use of fertilizer. The lawn's top growth has slowed so these nutrients go straight to the roots for a strong start next spring. Your turf actually converts the fertilizer into food reserves and loads up its root system so it's

ready, willing and able to get a quick (and healthy) start in spring.

- **Lower The Height Of Your Mower:** Your lawn should enter winter without any young, tender growth that could make it more appealing to winter diseases, like snow mold. New, soft growth on the lawn is also more prone to dry out after the first winter winds come through, leaving you with a tan or brown lawn all winter. So as late fall approaches, begin to gradually bring the cutting height down on your mower until you are almost – but not quite – scalping the lawn. It's important to do this in several steps to avoid suddenly removing all the green leaf tissue and damaging the turf.