

# The Post & Mail

Weekend Edition, September 18-19, 2010

Whitley County's most complete news source

Volume 109 Issue No. 220

## Home Improvement Fall 2010



The Post & Mail

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The Post & Mail  
www.thepostandmail.com

## Getting your lawn in gear for fall

After one of the hottest, wettest summers on record, lawns need some TLC

COLUMBIA CITY — It's a common sight across Columbia City—brown patches on lawns. Despite homeowners' best attempts to keep lawns lush and green, the summer of 2010 was difficult even for seasoned lawn care pros.

"While grass is a remarkable plant and can handle weather extremes with the best of them, sometimes the pressure is just too great," says Ryan Meinika, owner of Spring-Green Lawn Care in Columbia City.

In the Midwest, the majority of lawns are made up of cool-season grasses: Kentucky Bluegrass, Perennial Ryegrass, Turf-Type Tall Fescue and Fine Fescue. These grasses grow best at temperatures between 60 and 75 degrees and with adequate moisture. When the daytime temperatures approach 85 degrees, cool season grasses begin to decline, making summer the most stressful time of the year.

"When temperatures exceed 80 degrees for over a month straight, as it did in July and August, cool season grasses just can't cope," says Meinika. "Worse yet, during the same period of time, many areas in the Midwest experienced record rainfall and elevated humidity levels which led to increased disease activity.

When heat, humidity and excessive moisture levels are added together, it often leads to an increase in disease activity. Diseases such as Brown Patch and Dollar Spot, normally only seen on golf courses or on lawns in the southern part of the country, were, and continue to be, a common occurrence.

As the weather cools, lawns will begin to recover on their own. However, with a little work, damaged lawns can mend more quickly. Here are some tips from Meinika on the best way to revive a damaged lawn:

### Aerate away

One of the best ways to revive 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

For the best results, invest in a good quality blend of grasses because when choosing seed, you tend to get what you pay for. 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

of thumb is to apply no more than one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet.

### 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, bring the cutting height down on your mower a notch or two.

For more information about Spring-Green Lawn Care and its services, contact Meinika at 260-244-0004, via e-mail at [rmeinika@spring-green.net](mailto:rmeinika@spring-green.net) or visit [www.spring-green.com/rmeinika](http://www.spring-green.com/rmeinika).



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 from five to seven days for Perennial Ryegrass 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

Fall fertilization is critical to help a lawn recover from summer stresses. 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. Lawns should be fertilized two or three times during the fall. Most fertilizer bags have instructions on the amount of product to apply per 1,000 square feet. General rule