



## May Tips

### LAWNS AND LANDSCAPING

Contact: Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- A slope of 6 inches per 100 feet is needed for excess water to run off your lawn and not pool up on it. Also, reseed any bare spots in your new lawn immediately to keep weeds from growing.
- The average family's needs and activities change in cycles of six to seven years. The smaller the property, the greater the landscape planning challenge. Design outdoor areas and facilities to be modified easily with your changing needs.
- Sharpen your lawn mower blade monthly since a dull blade can pull grass seedlings from the soil instead of cutting them.
- Lengthening the time between waterings combined with deep, heavy watering encourages root growth while reducing top growth in lawns. This increases the root-to-shoot ratio and produces plants that are more resistant to wilting when exposed to infrequent watering.
- Letting a young lawn grow too tall and then cutting it back to the recommended height is detrimental. Such extreme leaf removal stops the flow of food to the roots, weakens the plants, and opens the lawn to diseases. Never let it grow so tall that you have to cut off more than one third of the grass blade.
- Poor soil drainage can be improved by re-grading and filling water-collecting areas, installing underground drain pipe/tiles, or a combination of both. When possible, connect rain gutter down spouts to drains to carry excess water away from foundations and other undesirable areas.
- Mulch around newly planted trees and shrubs. This practice reduces weeds, reduces fluctuations in soil temperature, retains moisture, prevents damage from lawn mowers, and looks attractive.
- Save money on mulch materials by using 1 to 2 inches of wood chips before spreading 2 inches of decorative shredded bark. Wood chips are less expensive than shredded bark and last longer, too. Keep mulch several inches away from the trunks of trees and shrubs so air can circulate near the trunk discouraging diseases, and so that rodents will not feed on the bark.
- When you visit gardens and arboreta, take your camera and note pad with you. Plan now for changes you will make in your landscape to add spring glory.
- For maximum landscape interest in a small space, try annual vines. They can disguise ugly walls and enliven fences. When trellised, they create shade and privacy while hiding undesirable views. Morning glory and its relative cardinal climber (*Ipomoea* spp.) can be started indoors or sown outside after the last frost date. Canary creeper (*Tropaeolum* spp.) can be grown in mountainous areas. For edible ornamentals try scarlet runner beans or Chinese bitter melon (*Momordica* spp.).
- Plan a landscaping project on paper first. Do not over plant, be sure you know the ultimate size of each plant, and allow for growth.

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- Lawns maintained at the correct height resist disease and weed infestation. Kentucky bluegrass and tall fescue should be kept between 2 to 3 inches in height. Mow frequently, removing no more than one third of the blade at each cutting.
- Don't over water your lawn this summer. Too much water leaches nitrogen from the soil, encourages weeds, and invites disease problems.
- Creeping red fescue may be used for turf in shady, drought- prone areas. Keep this grass at 2 to 2 and 1/2 inches in height.
- If your lawn is bluegrass/fescue, resist the urge to fertilize now. Fall is the time to fertilize these grasses. Fertilizing now will keep you behind the lawn mower all spring and increase chance of injury to your lawn from summer disease and drought.
- Moles feed on white grubs and can ruin lawns while burrowing after them. Moles can be eliminated by eliminating the grubs. Consult the Cooperative Extension Service for current pest control recommendations.
- Grass clippings can be used as mulch in flower beds and vegetable gardens if allowed to dry well before use. Fresh, damp, grass clippings will mat and may attract pests. Never use clippings from a lawn that has been treated with an herbicide.

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*Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dom, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.*

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