

Pesticide Free: Fall

Tips for September, October & November

Cover crops

Fall is the perfect time for amending, refurbishing or establishing a lawn and cover crops are terrific way to do this. Some examples of cover crops are Annual Ryegrass, Tall Fescue, Fall Rye, Seed Oats, Seed Barley, Vetch, Winter Peas, Buckwheat Seed, and Clover.

Plant cover crops from September to early October and seed on the heavy side. They grow in most situations such as gravelly, sandy, clay soils. To encourage healthier cover crops incorporate natural soil amendments such as green sand, alfalfa and compost for nutrients and moisture retention. Till or dig in cover crops in early spring as soon as soil is workable from winter season.

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Preparing your lawn for fall:

1. Consider what your ultimate goal is for your lawn's appearance for the rest of the year and for the following spring.
2. Perform a soil test using a soil test kit.
3. Mow the lawn short: one to two inches in height. Longer blades of grass attract small rodents.
4. Remove as many weeds as you can.
5. Aggressively rake or de-thatch the lawn.
6. Aerate soil with a core aerator that has sharp tines that remove 4 to 5 inch plugs of soil.
7. Depending on the results of your soil test, add soil amendments such as compost blends or dolomite lime.
8. Re-grade low areas of lawn.
9. Decide whether to use sod, seed or plugs (ground covering plants).
10. Re-seed with grass seeds that are suited to existing lawn, climate and water restrictions (if any).
11. Apply seed according to instructions on the package. It's best to use hand held, push drop or broadcast spreaders. If incorporating new sod, use turf starter fertilizers or natural amendments to encourage a healthy start.
12. Water every day until new planting or seed has germinated.
13. Ease into a regular maintenance program of fertilizer and mowing.
14. For established lawns, irrigate infrequently, for 20 to 30 minutes at a time.
15. Apply compost tea one more time in fall to help winterize and strengthen lawn.
16. Rake up dead leaves or bag them and incorporate them into compost. Leaving a thick layer of dead leaves can cause winter kill when packed under snow and ice.
17. If you have an underground irrigation system, hire an irrigation company to blow out irrigation and sprinkler systems. October is a good time to do this.
18. Clean up flower gardens and deposit end of the season debris into compost.
19. Make sure composts are properly layered, dampened and churned to produce high quality compost for the following spring season. Lawn clippings can be put into compost as long as there is no chemical residue.
20. Clean and disinfect all equipment such as pruners, mowers, weed wackers and all hand tools to rid of unwanted pathogens.
21. Check equipment for any broken or damaged parts.