

**First in a Series**

*Sod Farmers' Secrets*  
**On Watering & Fertilizing**  
*For A Fabulous Lawn*

The secrets are coming out...how professional turfgrass sod producers grow acres and acres of beautiful and healthy grass. To help homeowners have a fabulous lawn, the not-for-profit Turf Resource Center headquartered in suburban Chicago asked some of the leading turf producers what were their “secrets to success” to growing great grass. Here’s what they said about watering and fertilizing that can help homeowners create their own healthy and beautiful lawns:

“Don’t apply fertilizer in the spring until the grass is really growing. For warm season grasses such as Bermuda, Centipede or St. Augustine, hold-off until you have at least a week of nighttime temperatures that are 60° F or above. For cool season grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass, Fescue, Rye and Zoysia, wait until you have a week of nighttime temperatures that are above 50° F.”

*Ben Copeland, Sr.*  
*Patten Seed/Super Sod*  
*Lakeland, GA*

“Spoon-feed cool-season grasses monthly with a coated or slow-release fertilizer to keep a deep-green color with only moderate growth year-round and eliminate a flush of growth or the ‘feast/famine’ approach that single seasonal applications of fertilizer can create. Just apply a fertilizer blend of 24-6-6, with iron, in small amounts throughout the summer (except the hottest month of the year).”

“For grass that’s a deeper green, apply a small amount of chelated iron. It will also stimulate root growth.”

*Doug Barberry*  
*Aldino Sod Farms, Inc.*  
*Churchville, MD*

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“If you can only fertilize your lawn once a year, late season fertilization is the one! If timed properly, an application of high nitrogen, water soluble fertilizer such as 32-3-10, will be absorbed by the plant and converted to carbohydrates—‘food’ that the grass plant uses to grow the most amazing root system all winter long. Your lawn is not ‘asleep’ in January and February and with a late season fertilizer application your lawn can grow roots all winter long. Timing is the key. Applied too soon and you’ll get a flush shoot growth, apply too late and the plant is too dormant to take the ‘food’ into its dormant system. While there is no exact date, try to time the last application about 30 days before your area’s first hard freeze.”

“Water infrequently and heavily, applying one inch of water a week, in one application, letting the lawn dry out before watering again. The roots will ‘follow’ the moisture down, promoting a deeper root that will help the plant survive the summer heat. The worst thing you can do is water frequently and lightly – a common practice by those homeowners who want to ‘show-off’ their fancy irrigation system by making it come on four-five times each day for five to ten minutes. This practice promotes a very shallow root system that can be a problem when its get hot or water is rationed and then your lawn turns crispy because it doesn’t have the deep root system necessary to survive the summer heat and drought.”

*Randy Tischer  
Green Velvet Sod Farms  
Bellbrook, OH*

“To get the most benefit from a spring-time application of fertilizer on Kentucky bluegrass, wait until after the grass sets seed heads. After the seed heads are set, the grass plant turns its energy to growing deep and plentiful roots that will help take the plant through the heat of summer.”

*Tom Keeven  
Emerald View Turf Farm  
Columbia, IL*

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“A ‘Holiday’ fertilization schedule works wonders for many areas where cool-season grasses are grown. Fertilize no later than Memorial Day, around Labor Day and again before Thanksgiving. Spaced this way, you’ll have a lawn that has a well-developed, healthy root system, enhanced color retention in the fall, plus early spring green-up. A healthier, denser, slower growing turf in the spring that results in fewer weed, disease and insect problems and less mowing translates into better lawn with lower maintenance time and costs.”

*Darwin McKay  
The Turf Company  
Meridian, ID*

“There are no secrets...just common sense! Water and fertility are the two critical keys.

Fertilize in early summer (after the spring flush of growth) and again in late summer or early fall to encourage replacement of roots lost due to drought or summer heat.

Whenever grass is watered, apply more than a measured inch.  
What else is there to growing great grass?”

*Richard Schiedel  
Greenhorizon Group, Inc.  
Cambridge, Ontario*

For more information about caring for your lawn and the environment, visit the website of Turfgrass Producers International...the not-for-profit trade association for turfgrass sod farmers at [www.TurfGrassSod.org](http://www.TurfGrassSod.org). Also at this web site is a complete copy of the award-winning book, “*Water Right – Conserving Our Water, Preserving Our Environment*”. The book can be viewed or downloaded directly from the website.

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