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For Immediate Release:

Fall—The Best Time to Rejuvenate Your Lawn

Horticultural experts generally agree that proper lawn care in the fall has greater impact than similar efforts in the spring or any other season for rejuvenating a lawn throughout the year. Fall is the season when turfgrass growth begins to slow. It is also a good time to help your grass develop the stamina it will need to survive the stress of winter and get a head start for the coming spring.

Early October is generally the right time to focus additional attention for cool-season (northern U.S.) grasses, while the latter part of the month is best for warm-season varieties found in the more southern locations.

To achieve maximum benefit for year-round results, fall lawn care requires a number of different efforts, including mowing, removal or mulching lawn debris, aerating, fertilizing and watering. The sequence of these efforts is as important as how they are performed.

Mowing

In addition to the immediate beauty of a freshly cut lawn, mowing in accordance with the following guidelines can help generate and maintain healthier turfgrass plants.

- Make sure the mower blade is sharp—the ragged cut made by a dull blade tends to shred the grass blade tips, exposing a larger surface area to disease, pest and water loss.
- Set the proper cutting height—the higher cutting height used during the summer (when the photosynthetic processes in the leaf tissues are at their peak) should have progressed to a lower cutting height late in the fall when the plant begins to store food reserves. The lower cutting height, without scalping, helps harden and strengthen the plants' roots and crown with increased nutrients that would otherwise have been used by longer grass blades.

- **Lawn Debris**—up to one inch of leaves can be mulched to serve as a protective cover during the coming cold season. However, clumps or large leaves, such as often accumulate in low spots, could trap dampness and become a breeding spot for diseases and pests. If in doubt, remove the debris with a mulching mower and dump it the compost bin for recycling into a nutrient-rich amendment for future garden use.

Aerating the Soil

After a year of a being trampled upon by various activities that tend to pack the soil, the grass roots need a breath of fresh air (oxygen) for respiration that only proper aeration can provide. This helps the root systems better establish themselves for the coming winter. Aeration should take place approximately two weeks before applying the year's final fertilizer, or five to six weeks before the first frost.

The most effective aerator has hollow tines that penetrate the ground and remove core plugs of soil that are expelled as each successive plug is removed, leaving a vent for true aeration. Although a freshly aerated lawn appears a bit unsightly with numerous plugs laying all over it, they will eventually dissolve, returning nutrients to the soil for use by the grass.

The unsightly appearance can be reduced and the plug dissolving process speeded up by mowing with a low-cutting blade once the plugs are dry. Be sure to remove the grass clipping bag and then mow the entire lawn in a left-to-right pattern, followed by an up-and-down pattern to assure even break-up and spreading of the aeration plugs. After mowing, watering the lawn further helps dissolve the aeration plugs.

Fertilizing/Weed Control

The fall application of a weed-and-feed type fertilizer provides longer lasting benefits to a lawn than that of any other time of the year. Fertilizer should be timed about one month before the first frost. It is very important to read, understand and follow instructions on the fertilizer label. The following information should take the mystery out of how much and which type to fertilizer to buy, and how to apply it efficiently.

- **How much**—The fertilizer bag label advises how many square feet the product will cover, any portion not used will be just as effective next year, if stored in a cool, dry area.
- **Which type**—Any reputable lawn and garden retailer will be able to recommend the best fertilizer mixture for a particular time of the year. Many companies sell a 'Winterizer' product that will produce the greatest benefit to your lawn.

- **Proper application**—For proper coverage a broadcast spreader should be used. This reduces the likelihood of misapplication. To assure uniform coverage with either a broadcast spreader or a drop spreader, follow these simple steps:
 - 1) Adjust the spreader application dial to one-half of the fertilizer bag's recommended setting and make the first application in an up-and-down pattern, covering the entire lawn.
 - 2) Begin the second application immediately, in a left-to-right pattern, and continue over the entire lawn. (HINT: Use two small flags to mark the beginning and end of each row as you apply the fertilizer—small, brightly colored flags with stiff wire shafts work best.)

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