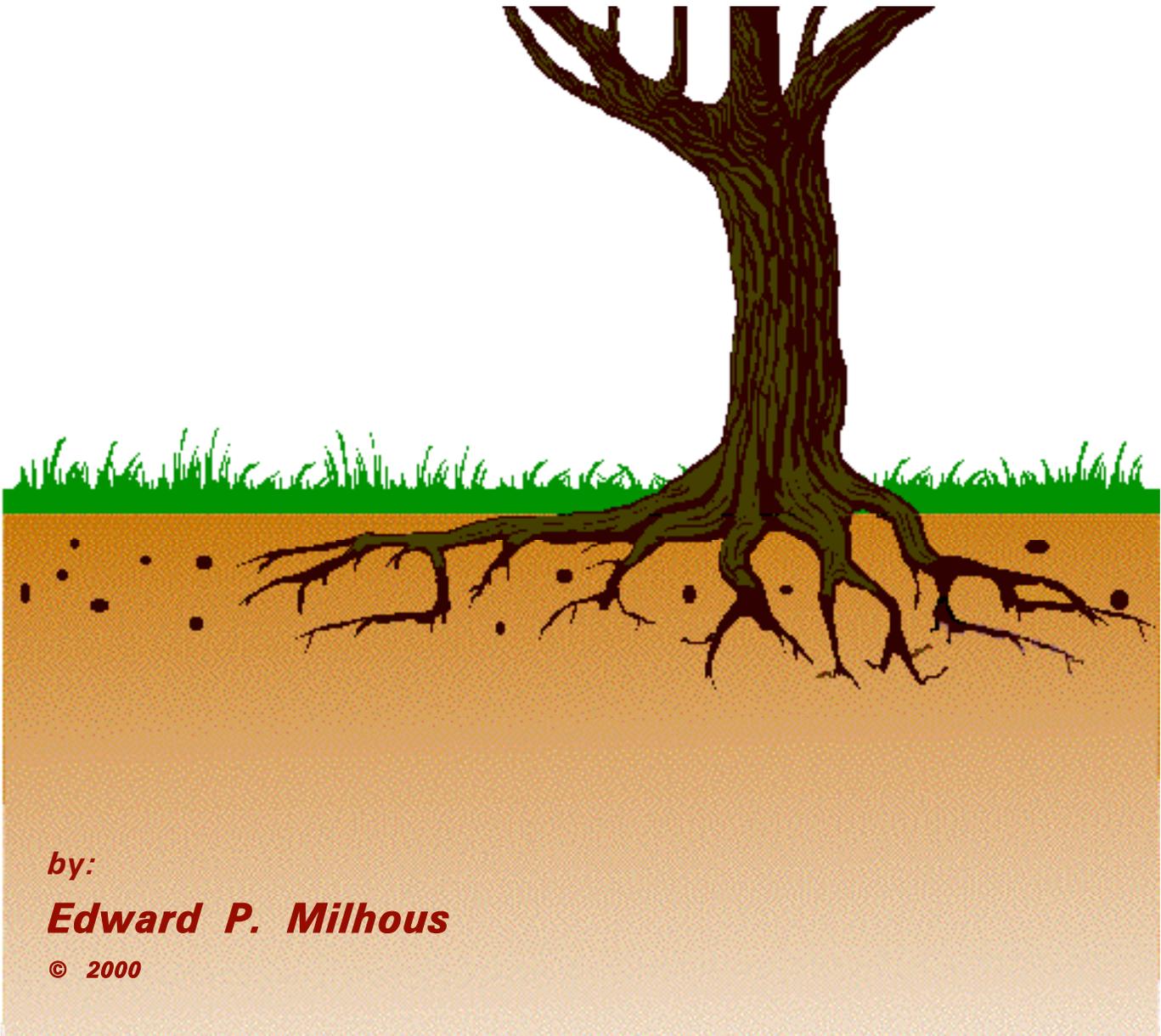


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# ***Lawncare Guidelines***

***Success And Sanity With Turfgrass***



***by:***

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# How *To Have A Nice Lawn*

A subject that mystifies many people

Suburban homeowners want their lawns to look good, but many lack the time or the know-how to do what is necessary.

It might be helpful to put things in perspective: studies have shown that the typical person cannot tell crabgrass from the finest quality, best kept turfgrass there is! Certainly there are folks whose hearts go pitter-patter when they see a nice lawn, but most people are not particularly interested, at least until their lawn declines drastically.

Actually, there is less mystery to the culture of turfgrasses than you might think... but there are many myths. At certain times of the year, it is necessary to spend some time and effort on your lawn. Properly timing certain activities is critical to success. However, beyond that, a lawn is fairly easy to care for.

If you cannot meet these requirements, it may be beneficial to hire a company to do what is necessary. A lawn that is neglected or abused will have problems.

Any lawn owner should expect his grass to be less than ideal in appearance at certain times of the year, regardless of effort.

Some years the weather cooperates and the grass does well... some years the weather wreaks havoc on lawns, just as it does all agriculture ventures.

All farmers do the best they can, and accept the consequences of those events they cannot control. If you do the same, your lawn will be easy to live with. If you do not, prepare for frustration.

# HOW *To Ruin Your Lawn*

Four easy ways to make a lawn into a weed patch

- **use the wrong species of grass or poor quality seed**

Northern Virginia is in what is known as the transition zone. We are too far south for the cool season types (fescues and bluegrass) to thrive; but we are too far north for the warm season types (zoysia and Bermudagrass) to stay green all year. Most people are happiest over the long haul with the varieties known as "turf-type tall fescues", although you may wish to mix in a little bluegrass when seeding. A list of currently recommended varieties is available from the Extension Service. The names on the list change as problems show up on certain varieties, or as new improved ones are produced.

Whatever you buy, get Certified Seed; that ensures that you get what the label says and that it does not contain noxious weeds.

- **mow the grass improperly**

Mowing has more effect on the health of a lawn than any other maintenance practice. The rule to follow is in two parts:

*First*, mow often enough that you never remove more than 1/3 of the green tissue at a time.

*Second*, cut it high! Bluegrass/fescue lawns should be cut at a height of 2 to 3 1/2 inches. So, when the grass is 4 inches tall, you should cut off an inch.

Never scalp a lawn! That may be the worst thing that can happen to a lawn. It may not recover from *one* scalping until next year.

Bagging clippings is not necessary if you follow the rule, and is undesirable since the clippings too often end up at the landfill, and since they contain nitrogen that can be recycled.

## • **fertilize it improperly**

The only way to know what kind of fertilizer to use is to have your soil tested. Chances are you need lime, but how much and what kind? Without that soil test, you're just guessing!

In general, bluegrass/fescue lawns use 3 to 4 pounds of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in a year. Almost all of it should be applied in autumn and none in winter or early spring.

It is best to use a slow release fertilizer, except in late fall when a readily available nitrogen is preferable.

Natural organic types add beneficial organic matter, but can be more difficult to use when consistent results are essential.

## • **water it improperly**

Watering any plant should be done infrequently but thoroughly.

Soak the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches, and then let it dry out before watering again.

Turfgrasses use about an inch of water a week, but they survive drought very well, will turn green when rain and cool temperatures return, and thus really do not need to be watered.

The *worst* thing to do is to water lightly in the evening every day; this promotes shallow rooting and encourages fungus diseases. Water grass early in the day so that it does not remain wet all night.

For newly seeded lawns, a light watering 2 or more times a day for 14 to 21 days will help the seed germinate. Then water thoroughly and infrequently.

**D**ecide what level of quality you want your lawn to be. A “Low” level is just fine for many people; they only need to mow, fertilize, and lime.

A step up is into the “Medium” level. That requires some overseeding, leaf collection, and occasional herbicide applications as well.

A “High” level of quality will require more time and resources than typical homeowners are willing to allocate to their lawns.

Most people are satisfied if their lawns are in the medium level.

# Relationship Of Maintenance Specifications To Lawn Quality

adapted from a Virginia Tech publication

<b>Maintenance Specification</b>	<b>Specifications Suggested for Various Levels of Turfgrass Quality</b>		
	<b><u>Low</u></b>	<b><u>Medium</u></b>	<b><u>High</u></b>
<b><u>Basic Activities</u></b>			
Mowing	X	X	X
Edging			X
Leaf Collection		X	X
Fertilization	X	X	X
Liming	X	X	X
Herbicide Application		X	X

<b>Maintenance Specification</b>	<b>Specifications Suggested for Various Levels of Turfgrass Quality</b>		
	<b><u>Low</u></b>	<b><u>Medium</u></b>	<b><u>High</u></b>
<b><u>Accessory Activities</u></b>			
Fungicide Application			X
Insecticide Application			X
Aeration <sup>1</sup>			X
Dethatching			X
Overseeding		X	X

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<sup>1</sup> Many professionals think aeration should be promoted to a requirement for medium-quality turfgrass. Certainly, compacted soils are a significant problem in much of suburbia, but aeration needs to be done routinely to have any significant effect on soil compaction.

## ***Tips On Fertilization***

The numbers on a bag of fertilizer give the fertilizer "analysis"; they indicate the percentages of nitrogen, phosphate, and potash in the bag. If you buy 50 lbs. of 20-5-3, you get 10 lbs. of actual nitrogen, 2.5 lbs. of phosphate, and 1.5 lbs. of potash.

Usually the application rate is based on the nitrogen content. If you have a lawn area of 10,000 sq. ft. (slightly less than 1/4 acre) and you want to apply 2 lbs. of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft., you need to buy 20 lbs. of actual nitrogen, or 100 lbs. of 20-5-3. You would get the same amount of nitrogen if you bought 200 lbs. of 10-10-10, or 400 lbs. of 5-10-10. In the later two examples, you would get much more phosphorus and potassium as well as nitrogen.

A slow release nitrogen fertilizer should have at least 50% of its nitrogen in a water insoluble form and will be labeled "50% WIN". With slow release nitrogen there is less chance of plant injury or pollution.

*Natural* organic fertilizers are slow release and also add organic matter to the soil, which is beneficial, but some people think they are hard to use. They also cost more than traditional fertilizers. I think they are worth it!