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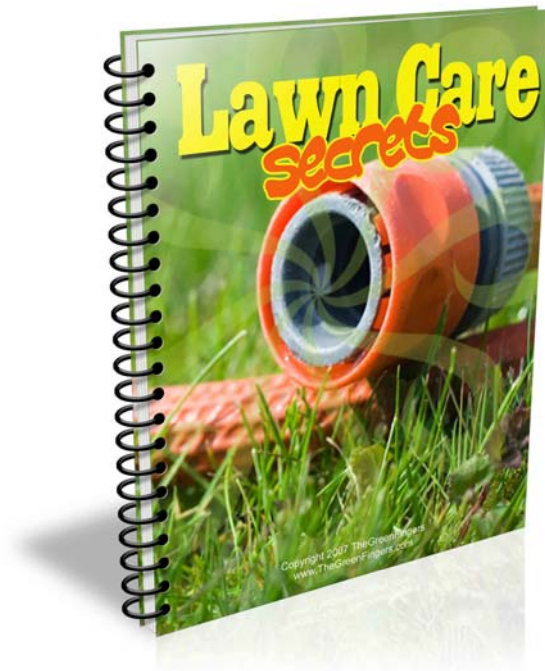
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**Lawn Care Secrets**

**By TheGreenFingers.com 2007 ©**

## Lawn Care Secrets

Have you ever looked at your neighbor's lawn and wondered how he or she keeps it looking so green and plush? Are you embarrassed when friends come over because they ask you how long ago your lawn caught fire? Or do you have your lawn looking good, but you want to really show up everyone on the street and now you need the tips that will take your lawn to the top? Regardless the condition of your turf, if you want to move up the ladder of lawn quality you should check out these 10 lawn care secrets, all of which are used by professionals and grass enthusiasts everywhere.



## Secret #1- Landscaping

It might surprise you that landscaping has all that much to do with how you keep your grass lush and green, but it does. Not so much that your landscaping can help your grass get there as much as it is that if you do landscaping wrong you stand a good chance of having grass that looks – how do you say? – Less good.

Building multiple levels into your yard can look really cool, but there is a drawback: If there is a spot that is particularly low compared to the rest of the yard, it is very likely that moisture will accumulate there, and in combination with poor air circulation (often also found in low spots) this can be a potent formula for grass disease. Make different levels in your landscaping, but make sure that the low spots are not places where you don't mind having water accumulate – like in a rock garden or rice paddy (just kidding... but there certainly are some sorts of fruits or garden veggies that like slightly more wet environs).



Grass loves the sun, so if you want big trees and lots of shade you might have to give up a bit of quality in your turf, and vice-versa. There are certain grass varieties that deal better with shade than others, which will be discussed a bit more under planting. The other reason why you should be careful when choosing larger shrubs or trees for your yard is that roots from larger plants will start to grow up into your yard. Always deal gently with root pop-ups to avoid traumatizing your plants.

A lawn friendly option to consider when you are planning your yard is the use of the footpath. If there are places in your yard where you will frequently walk, like to the garden, compost pen, or the clothes-drying line, it might be better for your grass just to have some stepping stones or a flagstone path. With a footpath, these paths won't be worn too thin by constant stepping on – and footpaths can be rather attractive additions to your landscaping if they are done right.

## Secret #2- Aerating

If you're at all like me, then aerating has always been a mystifying component of lawn care. Why aerate? Isn't it just a hassle that gets stuck to your shoes and makes it look like there is goose poop all over the yard?

Grass needs water, oxygen, and nutrients to grow healthy. The ideal dirt for grass growing has about 50% air spaces and 25% of that would actually be air – I have no idea what these percentages mean, but what the whole thing means is this: Turf grows better in loose soil because it is getting more of the necessities for growth. Apparently most residential housing is built on fairly compacted soil, which means that most grass in residential areas need to be aerated yearly or every other year to help provide mix up the soil, allow fertilizer to work better, and to get a proper amount of water and air to the grass. Aeration is especially needed if your grass is high traffic – if you have lots of kids playing in your yard the dirt will probably be more quickly compacted.

How is aerating done? Usually with special equipment that pulls out little round plugs between an inch and two inches long. A recent trend has seen sales of spiky boots of a sort which are intended to be used to tromp around the yard and which are supposed to break up thatch and help



aerate grass. These boots really are not effective for aerating, especially if the soil is quite compacted (as one web-reviewer said, "Lawn stabbing doesn't mean lawn aeration). However, if you merely have a mild thatch problem these spiked lawn aerators might be all you need.

### **Secret #3- Planting**

There are a number of factors to consider in planting grass. There are two main methods: Seeding and laying sod. Laying sod is where you place already grown grass strips on a completely empty plot of dirt. Planting seeds is significantly cheaper than using sod, but it also takes much longer to have an established yard full of turf when you use seeds. To lay sod, you will undoubtedly want to consult a lawn professional – and I suppose that whether you seed or sod, the comments here on choosing grass types will apply.

There is also one other grass planting method worth mentioning. Hydroseeding is the newcomer in the land of lawn maintenance. Seeds are mixed with a cellulose fiber mixed media that contains water and fertilizer. This mixture is then sprayed on naked soil. This allows a more even spreading of the seeds and also adds nutrients to the soil. Hydroseeding has the advantages of traditional seeding – a more advanced root system – while improving the speed of establishing a lawn to nearly that of sodding.

Before doing anything, take a moment and realize how much work it is to keep an amazing lawn going. Decide for yourself how much work you will be willing to put into it. This will keep you from putting a bunch of money into a project that you are going to let die in a few weeks anyway. Next, evaluate the climate you live in – it will affect the types of grass which you will want to put in and when you should plant new grass. Finding a professional turf man and asking what grass varieties he prefers for this area is a good idea at this point.

Understand the difference between cool season grasses and warm season grasses and find out which are right for your area. Some examples of cool season grasses are Kentucky bluegrass and creeping red fescue. Warm season grasses include bermudagrass, carpetgrass, and Saint Augustine. You should also realize that most of the best turfs are combinations of several grass

varieties. Variation makes the grass more resistant to disease as well hardier for dealing with changing seasons and weather conditions. Cool season grasses are usually planted in the fall – warm season grasses are planted in the spring.

It might seem weird to talk about which variety of grass to plant in your yard because it seems like it should be obvious – how many different types of grass are there, anyway? Isn't the type that is already planted in my yard and all my neighbors' yards just fine? The short answer: Yes. It probably is just fine, depending on what you want out of your lawn. If you want a place for your kids to play football, and your dog to use indiscriminately, then don't change a thing. But if you dream of having your house pictured in "Home and Garden" or of someday hosting a lawn bowling party, then its time to step it up and find the grass that is right for your environment.



[Precision Garden Seeder](#)

## Secret #4- Fertilizing



Fertilizer provides three essential nutrients that your soil might be lacking: Nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium. All three of these are vital to plant growth, but are nutrients that need to be replenished because plants like grass use up these elements without replacing them (unlike peanut plants, which are amazing because they “fix” nitrogen back into the soil). You should fertilize when you first plant seeds, and certainly every year thereafter. Fertilizing before winter will help your lawn recover better in the spring. Fertilizing in the spring will help your grass grow strong and healthy through the summer. If you really want to be a lawn pro – get a soil testing kit so you can know which nutrients your soil especially needs and focus in your fertilizing efforts.

**Secret #5- Mowing**

What I am about to say probably goes against everything you have ever heard or practiced concerning the mowing of your lawn: Leave your grass longer; don't cut it too short! A good rule of thumb is to never cut off more than one third of the grass blade in any one cutting. If you cut off too much at one time your grass might go into shock. And contrary to common sense, grass actually grows faster if you cut off too much.

This is because grass needs its upper green blades to collect sunlight. For plants to get energy they must gather sunlight for photosynthesis, the process by which they create energy. Most of the photosynthesis in grass goes on in the upper half of the blade, the green part. If you cut that part off, you force the plant to grow extra fast so it can get back to gathering sunlight.

Longer grass is also better in that it stays greener. Longer grass means deeper roots, which in the end could mean less watering. A better root system can also mean that less weeds are able to thrive. Longer grass sometimes mean that you will need to mow more often, but if you mow more often, it could eliminate your need to catch the clippings.

In fact, as long as you are not cutting too much at one time, it can be quite beneficial to let the clippings fall. The clippings can act as a sort of natural fertilizer, returning nutrients to the soil. However, if too much clippings accumulate, it can cut of the airflow around the grass plants, so it isn't a bad idea to occasionally rake up clippings if they aren't decomposing quickly and the wind isn't blowing them about. Raked up clippings can also be used in a compost pile with leaves and other natural waste; or try using grass clippings as mulch around trees or garden plants.

Finally, remember to keep your lawn mower blade sharp and your lawn mower

engine in good shape. Sharp blades will make the job easier for you, and will also be better for the grass. A clean cut will take less energy to heal than the jagged tears that most lawn mower blades produce.



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## Secret #6- Watering

Watering is best done in the early morning or evening when the sun and heat won't immediately dry some of the moisture up.

The amount of water your tuft needs will depend on a number of factors. Your climate and recent weather patterns will change the watering needs some (I would suggest purchasing, finding, or building a rain gauge of some sort), but the amount of

water needed will also vary with different types of soil and different types of grass, as well with a number of other factors. How many other plants there are in your yard will also change your watering needs, primarily in that other large plants, especially trees, tend to suck up a fair bit of water.

There is, however, such thing as too much watering. Using too much water can strip the soil of nutrients and not give the plant time to absorb sunlight, something else it needs.

If you find watering your plants troublesome, you may want to look into creating your own [automatic lawn sprinkler system](#).



## Secret #7- Weeding

Having a good turf will actually be your number one weed prevention plan, but you will still probably need to get out there and do some work. Here where I live in Colorado, it isn't just weeding, it is pulling up Aspen shoots, but since you will be smart and plan sustainable landscaping, you won't plant Aspens because they usually aren't good living in domesticated arrangements. The might live to be 20 years old, but then, when their root systems stretch through your yard but are never allowed to grow more plants, the Aspens will get start to die, or pick up some crappy disease or something like that.



Woah. I'll back off the rant and get back on topic. Weeding. Make sure you get the root of the weeds when you go after them. There are some good products that you can use if you want to.

**Secret #8- Pest/Disease Control**

There are some bugs that are natural and don't really do too much damage to your plants, and there are a few that you really don't want in your grass - especially in high numbers. There are a number of different chemicals which can be used to spray your yard to control those pests. If you suspect that you might have something other than the ordinary bugs in your yard, you really should call an expert and have him or her help you out with determining what the pest/disease is and what you can do to get rid of it.



[Pest Repeller](#)

**Secret #9- Repairing**

One way of repairing lawn damage caused by overuse, infestation, or disease is by reseeding. To do this, start with a double aeration of the trouble area. Next, spread seeds throughout, especially so that the seeds end up in the plug holes from aerating. This can also be done with turf that is not damaged, but is just a little bit thin and scraggly, only in this case, overseeding (as it's called) should be done after a single aeration. These overseeding techniques should allow the existing grass to grow better and give the seeds good soil for growing in.

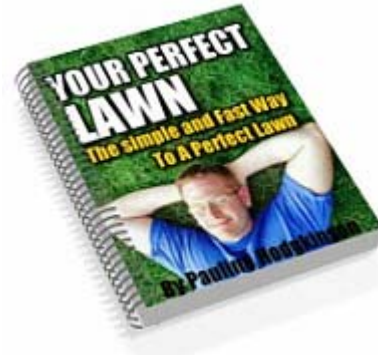


**Secret #10- Wintering**

I once read when I was a teenager that leaving a layer of leaves on your grass over the winter would help protect the grass from the snow and cold of winter. Turns out this was probably written by a teenager trying to get out of raking because it's not really true. It isn't necessary to rake your yard meticulously, but you want it to be clean. It is a good idea to fertilize before winter so that the nutrients will really be absorbed when all the snow melts in the spring, helping your grass to get a quick start.

## Sustainable landscaping, sustainable lawn care

Finally, a little plug from me: You don't really have to take care of your yard all the time and use hundreds of gallons of good clean water making your lawn look beautiful. You can still have a cool looking yard that is much lower maintenance and lower cost, too. It's called sustainable landscaping and it means that you don't really plant stuff that wouldn't grow and thrive naturally in your area. It might mean having more rock or clay-dirt or sand surfaces than grass, and having cacti instead of flowers, but you can do it really well if you have a good planner. You can do grass sustainable, too. If you don't water very often, it will make your grass grow deep roots, so it can suck all the moisture out that it can. Your lawn might not be the perfect green that your neighbors have, but who cares? You're working a quarter as much and grilling thrice the meat that he does because you save so much money on your water bill. Then all you need is a sign that says, "Stay off the grass!" and a little grass for yourself to stay off of, too.



If you are looking for more resources on lawn care, go to:

1. <http://www.thegreenfingers.com/lawncare>
2. <http://www.thegreenfingers.com/lawn.html>

