

Topics covered in this section

- Lawn products (Spring and Summer lawn fertilisers) • Fertiliser formulations
- Choosing the right product • Autumn lawn fertilizers • Tackling specific lawn problems

Additional useful references: The 'Lawn Expert', Manufacturers' literature (eg lawncare leaflets)

Lawn products

Spring and summer lawn fertilisers

Just like any other garden plant, grass must be fed in order to remain healthy and green. Lawn fertilisers for use in Spring and Summer contains extra nitrogen, which promotes grass growth and green-up. Lawn fertilisers are available as solid (i.e. granular or powder), liquid or soluble preparations. The benefits of each type and how and where to use them are given below.



Fertiliser formulations

Spring and summer lawn fertilisers come in a variety of formulations and combinations, which can be bewildering for customers. The key benefits of the different formulations are as follows:

Granular (standard) fertilisers

Standard granular products have the following characteristics:

- Particularly good for medium to large areas of grass, as they are quick to apply with a lawnspreader
- Control of both moss and weeds possible - ie triple action as well as dual action products available. Thus, they are a practical option for combined moss and weed control on larger areas of turf because they can be applied with a spreader.
- Relatively long lasting green-up (compared with liquid and soluble preparations)
- Grass should be dry and soil moist at the time of application

Other factors to consider before choosing a standard granular preparation:

- **Is the lawn established?** [This is a point to consider before using any spring or summer feed, but particularly important for granular products, where the lawn should be established for a year prior to this type of feed being applied. If a lawn is not established enough to apply a spring feed, an autumn one may be applied, as these are lower in nitrogen.]
- **Weather conditions.** It is not a good idea to apply a standard granular product in prolonged periods of dry weather and no lawn feed should be applied in drought conditions.
- **Equipment available.** A lawnspreader is definitely advisable for granular products. It is important to apply any lawn feed evenly and accurately, but this is particularly important for standard granular feeds. The alternative to using a spreader is to subdivide the lawn into square metres, weigh out the requisite amount of feed for a square metre and apply this evenly over the area - a bit fiddly, to say the least!
- **Watering.** If no rain falls within 48 hours of application, it is important to apply sufficient water to take the food down to the grass roots. The amount required is around two gallons per square metre. A sprinkler would be almost essential to apply this amount over anything other than a tiny lawn. Once a sprinkler has been on for an hour it will have delivered sufficient water. This is a good tip and will help to circumvent potential problems with scorch.

Soluble fertilisers (* also applies to liquid products)

Soluble spring and summer lawn fertilisers have the following characteristics:

- May be applied with either watering can (eg for smaller lawns) or hose end dilutor for quicker application over larger areas of turf
- Even application not so critical as it is for granular products
- More tolerant of dry conditions - no need to water in
- Rapid green-up but shorter lived than that achieved by granular products
- Combined products available - ie with added weedkiller or mosskiller - but combined soluble products must only be applied through a watering can. They are not suitable for application through a hose end dilutor, thus are more practical for small to medium lawns and less so for larger areas of turf.

LAWNCARE

Liquid fertilisers

Liquid lawn fertiliser preparations have the following characteristics:

- May be applied with watering can or, in the case of some products, a sprayer*.
*This is an advantage for larger areas, in particular, as coverage is quicker and easier with a sprayer.
- Liquid products containing weed killer tend to be especially effective at weed control, especially if applied with a sprayer. This is particularly relevant if you have difficult lawn weeds to treat (eg pearlwort, yarrow, speedwell, trefoil)

'Controlled release' lawn fertilisers

These release nitrogen over a relatively long period of time, according to temperature levels and availability of water. They have the following benefits:

- Give long lasting green-up (one application usually lasts the whole season)
- Less prone to scorch . Less need to water in

Autumn lawn fertilisers

The application of an Autumn lawn fertiliser helps prepare grass for winter and leads to a more healthy lawn the following year. The balance of nutrients differs from Spring and Summer lawn fertilisers as there is less nitrogen and more phosphorus and potassium. Autumn feeds encourage healthy root growth, but do not stimulate lush, vigorous top growth. They help harden the grass, to tolerate the stress of Winter. A well developed root system helps lawns withstand drought conditions.

Autumn fertilisers should be applied from September to mid-November, but may also be used either as a pre-turf or seed preparation or as a feed for newer lawns in the main growing season. Until a lawn has been established for about a year, it should not be given too much nitrogen.

Autumn lawn fertilisers are available as granular, liquid or soluble preparations. As moss can be a problem in the autumn, some have added mosskiller. Granular fertilisers are good for larger areas and more well-drained soils, and, as with spring fertilisers, the grass should be dry at the time of application so that the granules do not stick to the blades of grass. Liquid and soluble fertilisers may be applied even if the grass is wet. Soluble preparations may be applied more quickly and easily with a hose end dilutor and some liquids may be applied via a sprayer, which is less labour intensive than applying the product using a watering can.

Tackling specific lawn problems

A healthy lawn depends on many factors; good maintenance, good drainage, the right soil pH, good nutrient status and good soil structure are as important for grass as they are for growing any other plant. Regular mowing (at a consistent height), removal of thatch and moss by raking and removal of other debris, such as fallen leaves, are the basics of good lawn maintenance. A vigorous sward is more capable of choking out weeds and moss and recovering from pest and disease attack.

Where it is necessary to treat lawn problems, but you do not need to feed the lawn, there are a number of straight weed and moss control products available.

NOTES

Lawn weeds

Some lawn weeds are relatively easy to control - normally lawn weeds with larger leaves will succumb to treatment with most products containing lawn weed killer. However there are weeds which can be particularly stubborn. Examples include pearlwort, trefoil, speedwell and yarrow - ie those with smaller leaves. It is generally best to treat these with a liquid preparation, applied with a sprayer to ensure good coverage of the weed leaves. Two applications four weeks apart and possibly further treatments in subsequent years may be necessary to eradicate such weeds.

Illustrations of lawn weeds are given in the Lawn Expert.



TURF MOSS

Lawn moss

Moss can be a problem on poorly drained areas of turf, in dense shade or acid conditions. Scalping the lawn when mowing can also lead to problems with moss. It is important to point out to customers that, whilst moss control products will solve the problem in the short term, in the longer term the growing conditions will need to be improved, taking steps to help drainage/reduce shade etc as necessary.

Lawn pests

Good garden hygiene (eg removing fallen leaves] helps to keep problems with pests, such as cast-forming worms, to a minimum. There are now no chemical controls for lawn pests available to the amateur gardener. Leatherjackets may be controlled by watering the lawn and covering overnight with a tarpaulin or plastic sheeting. The grubs may be collected in the morning.

Lawn diseases (general)

Good overall lawn care helps to minimise the likelihood of disease problems. (For descriptions of lawn pests and diseases, please refer to a good text book such as Lawn Expert).

Fairy rings

These may appear as a ring of luxuriant grass with, often, a number of small, toadstool-like fungi within the ring. If left untreated, the grass within the ring may die and the problem is likely to spread over the lawn. Fairy rings may be treated by cultural means (through digging out the grass and soil to a foot depth and a foot either side of the ring and replacing the soil and turf) .

Avoiding problems with lawncare products

Although the use of lawn products is beneficial to grass, if they are used carelessly they can cause problems and give rise to complaints. Some example problems and how they may be handled are discussed below.

Lawn scorch

Over application of solid lawn fertilisers, either locally or overall, applying them in drought conditions or failing to water products in sufficiently can all cause the grass to become scorched. Affected areas are either yellow or, in severe cases, brown.

Prevention

- Use an appropriate spreader at the correct setting, if the spreader is adjustable, when applying granular products
- Unless able to water products in thoroughly, do not apply granular products in periods of drought or if it is unlikely to rain in the near future.
- Granular lawn products, in particular, must be watered in thoroughly if no rain falls within 48 hours of application.
- Use liquid or soluble fertilisers if the weather is on the dry side, as these are less likely to cause scorch.
- In prolonged drought conditions it is best to avoid using a fertiliser until a reasonable amount of rain has fallen.

Lawn products can be stored satisfactorily for at least two years.

Corrective action

If a lawn is suffering from scorch it will normally recover in time, unless the damage is very severe. Water the lawn heavily - i.e. at least nine litres per square metre twice a week, or more often, if possible. This is better than frequent, light sprinklings which can worsen the problem.



LAWN SPREADERS

LAWNCARE

When mowing, the blades should be set high (about 1") to avoid placing the grass under extra stress; ensure that the mower blades are sharp.

If seeding is attempted too early, the presence of excess fertiliser is likely to inhibit germination. Damaged areas of lawn can be re-seeded. Before re-seeding damaged areas of lawn, at least six weeks should have elapsed since application.

Poor weed control

There are several reasons why weed control may not be as good as expected. Some of the possible explanations are as follows:

- Rainfall too soon after application of a weedkiller. If rain falls too soon after a product has been applied it may get washed off the weed leaves before it has had a chance to be absorbed. Ideally, a lawn weed killer needs to be present on the leaves for about 24 hours in order to be fully effective. After this, the lawn should be watered if no rain falls, particularly if a granular weed and feed product has been used.
- 'Difficult' weeds. Smaller leaved weeds, such as pearlwort and trefoil, really need to be treated with a suitable liquid lawn weedkiller at a higher rate (if given on product label). Two applications four weeks apart may even be needed.
- Weed growth not active enough. This can be the case if the weather is too cold or if conditions are too dry.
- Product applied unevenly/under-applied. If a product is applied unevenly, weed control will also be uneven. Although products should not be over-applied, it is important to apply the recommended rate evenly to ensure good control of weeds.
- Not enough leaf area present. Lawns should not be mowed for three days either side of weedkiller application to ensure that there is sufficient leaf area for the product to act on
- Not enough time been allowed. It can take up to six weeks for some weeds to be controlled, although in most cases effects should be seen before this.



TREFOIL

Corrective action

Where satisfactory weed control has not been achieved, try applying a straight lawn weedkiller (no fertiliser added) under more suitable conditions.

Poor control of moss

The possible explanations for this are similar to some of those for lack of weed control. If the weather is too cold or if rain washes the product off the leaves too soon after application, moss control will be less effective. Under-application of products will also reduce their effectiveness.

It is also easy to confuse pearlwort for moss, as pearlwort is moss-like in appearance. Where there has not been any effect on the treated plant, it is almost certain that there has been a case of mistaken identity! (Pearlwort is controlled by using a suitable liquid lawn weedkiller at the higher rate given on the product label)

Staining

Most moss control agents contain ferrous sulphate as the active ingredient. Ferrous sulphate can cause stubborn, rust-like stains on masonry or clothing. This can cause problems if it is accidentally spilt onto patios or paths or, for example, if children play on the lawn soon after a mosskiller product has been applied.

To remove the stains from concrete etc., use a concentrated solution of citric acid (available from the homebrew department of larger chemists). The solution should be applied to the stains and left for half an hour, before rinsing off with water. Gloves should be worn when applying the solution and it is advisable to test a small area first. Avoid the mixture coming into contact with stainless steel or enamel. It is an acid, as the name suggests, and care is necessary, although there should be no problems provided you wear gloves and act sensibly.