

Raft River Sod



Lawn Maintenance Guide (For the Intermountain West)

This step-by-step guide is designed to help our customers take care of their lawn with confidence. The most important elements in each section are in **bold**. Every lawn is unique, however these guidelines fit most conditions. You may need to make small modifications to fit your specific situation. This guide assumes that your lawn is already established. If not, see our **Yard Preparations**, or **Sod Installation** guides.

A healthy beautiful lawn is a result of **balance**; the right fertilizer, timing and amounts, the correct water management, the best mowing height for the season, early season preparation, weed and pest control. Just because a company claims to specialize in lawn and yard care, does not mean they will do the right things to your yard. Some companies often do what is easiest or make their decisions based only on profits, not necessarily the best thing for your lawn. **No one** will care about the long-term health and beauty of your lawn more than you.

Tools of the Trade

The following tools are **essential** to maintain a beautiful healthy lawn:

- **A sprinkler system**, with capacity to cover your lawn whenever it is needed. The system can be a garden hose and sprinkler, or an automatic underground system, as long as the capacity matches the size of your yard. The minimum system you need should be able to put $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of water on all of your lawn in a 12-hour period.
- A **mulching lawn mower** with an optional bag attachment, **grass trimmer**, **fertilizer spreader**, **6" screwdriver**, **water-measuring devices** (cans with straight sides and a ruler, or containers designed to measure the amount of water being applied).

Aeration

The purpose of aeration is to **loosen the soil** and allow more air and water penetration.

- To determine if your lawn should be **aerated**, walk across your lawn. If it has many small bumps caused by earthworms, you probably won't need to aerate.

The worms are providing “**natural aeration**”. In this case, you may consider renting a ride-on roller, to roll your lawn smooth, (the hand type rollers are not heavy enough). Water before raking.

- If you do not feel the earthworm bumps, push a **6” screwdriver into several places**. If the screwdriver enters easily and goes all the way with little pressure, you don’t need aeration. If, however, the screwdriver requires a fair amount of pressure, then you should aerate. The more pressure required, the more aggressive your aeration needs to be.
- Most lawns can be **aerated** in the early **Spring** as soon as the frost goes out of the soil. A spike type aerator is sufficient. If you use a plug aerator, plugs should be cleaned off the lawn.

De-Thatching

The purpose of de-thatching is to **remove excess thatch** in the Spring.

- To determine if your lawn needs de-thatching, spread your fingers and run them through the thickest grass in your lawn. If your hand is full of thatch, you should de-thatch. Loose thatch should be cleaned out of the lawn. One de-thatch in the Spring is usually sufficient.

Watering

The purpose of an irrigation system is to help **maintain a beautiful healthy lawn** with the least amount of cost and water.

- We accomplish this by **training your lawn** through infrequent irrigations. When you allow your lawn to dry out between water cycles, you promote deep roots, plant and soil health, and lower total water use. The longer time period between irrigation cycles, the more health your lawn will have.
- The idea of **infrequent irrigation** cycles is to put on as much water as your soil will hold, and then wait until your lawn needs water again.
- The grass, at the soil level, needs to dry out between each irrigation cycle. If it does not, mold, fungus, disease, and insects can thrive in continually moist conditions. Never water every day. It is not difficult to move irrigation cycles from what you’ve done in the past, to where it should be now.
- If you have irrigated every day in the past, change to every other day. If your lawn is used to every other day, try every third day. Add as many days between irrigation cycles as you can, but do it gradually. Most find they can eventually irrigate every 3rd or 4th day.
- To determine whether it is time to irrigate again, use a 6” screwdriver. Push it all the way in. If it comes out muddy do not irrigate. If it comes out moist, not muddy, wait a day and probe again. When the screwdriver is mostly dry, it is time to irrigate. Repeat this process each time you think you should irrigate.

After a few irrigation cycles, you will notice a pattern emerge that will help you determine the frequency of irrigation needed.

- Your lawn will require between $\frac{1}{4}$ " to 1" of water per week during growing season, depending on temperature and weather patterns. To determine how much water is needed each time you irrigate, include rainfall in your calculations. Use the following guidelines: when daytime temperatures are between 45-60°F, your grass needs $\frac{1}{4}$ " of water. Between 60-75° F = $\frac{1}{2}$ " of water. Between 75-90° F = $\frac{3}{4}$ " of water. 90° F and above, your lawn will need 1" of water per week. Add more water to these recommendations during windy periods.
- Methods of application of water may vary with sprinkler design, nozzle size, etc. No matter the method of application, it is important to know how much water is being put on your lawn. This can be done by simply putting small cans, cups, rain gauges, or any straight sided container throughout your yard. Each time water falls, whether it be from rain or sprinklers, measure it and empty the container. Add the totals for the week and you will know how much water is actually accumulating on your lawn.
- Over time you will become familiar enough with your water system that you may not need to measure.

Mowing

Mowing is an essential part of keeping your lawn healthy and beautiful. Some important concepts to remember:

- Never mow more than one inch of length at one time.
- The frequency of mowing is determined by the amount of time it takes to grow 1" – This will vary throughout the growing season.
- Always keep the mower blades sharp, so the mower slices the grass, rather than shatter it. Shattered grass ends turn brown or white. Because the shatter is on top, you will see the brown or white, rather than the deep green of your lawn.
- Mulch whenever you can. The mulched clippings become additional food for a well-managed lawn. However, if you have applied excessive amounts of nitrogen, fertilizer, or if it is during May and June, your grass will grow more quickly than usual. During periods of fast growth, you should bag clippings and mow more frequently, never mowing more than 1" each time.
- The height of your mowing should vary with the changing seasons. Start mowing in the Spring leaving the blades between 1 to 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ inches tall. Raise your mowing height a little at a time. By June your grass should be 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " tall. Maintain at this height until September, then gradually lower the mower height until your grass is 1 inch tall before Winter. Short grass will survive the rigors of Winter far better than tall grass.

Fertilizer

The use of lawn fertilizer should accomplish two main objectives:

1. Supply the grass plants with the nutrition needed to be healthy and beautiful.
2. Maintain in the deep dark green color most want to see.

In order to reach both objectives we need to understand some important concepts about fertilizer. The lawn industry generally accepts nitrogen as the most important part of lawn care. This idea is more profit driven than factual.

- Most lawns need more than nitrogen fertilizer to be healthy. I compare a nitrogen-only diet for a lawn, to a sugar high in a child nothing but a “sugar diet”, eventually the child will be sickly, weak, and unhealthy. After awhile it will take more sugar each time to get that high. The same is true for lawns. When we apply a high amount of nitrogen fertilizer, the grass responds. It is on a “high”. It grows fast and greens up quickly, but soon the rush is over and it loses color and the growth rate slows. If the main source of nutrition is nitrogen, the lawn will become unhealthy, subject to disease and other problems. Just as the child does not need large quantities of sugar in its diet, your lawn does not need large amounts of nitrogen. As with a child, your lawn needs a “balanced diet”. To feed your lawn correctly give it the right food. The following will help you do that:
- The large numbers on a fertilizer package tell the percentage of the main nutrients. The best fertilizers will also include micro-nutrients, which your lawn needs. Nitrogen is the 1st number on the package, Phosphate is the 2nd number, Potash is the 3rd number, Sulfur is the 4th number, and micro-nutrients follow.
- At the very least, you should use a fertilizer where the 1st and 2nd numbers are about the same, and include micro-nutrients. This number balance is often called starter fertilizer. For example: (16-16-5-3+ micro-nutrients) or something similar. Even though starter fertilizer is especially needed for new lawns, it makes a great long-term nutrient program plan.
- Follow package instructions. Reapply every 8 weeks. Double the application rate in October (this is the most important fertilization of the year).
- If you want to “make your neighbor jealous” with a dark green color, without all the additional growth, use a good iron product. I strongly recommend Ferrous Sulfate. (Be sure to sweep any iron product from cement after spreading or it may stain).

Insect Control

- If you follow the watering instructions and irrigate every few days, you’ll find very few insect problems associated with your lawn.
- Most insect problems come from grass that is not allowed to dry out.
- If you do have an insect problem, take a specimen to a garden center and follow their instructions.

Weed Control

- If you follow the steps outlined in this guide, you will find the grass will crowd out most weeds.
- The healthier the lawn, the fewer the weeds.
- Never use fertilizers that have weed control in them. If you do, you are putting large amounts of chemicals into the environment that do nothing but pollute.
- For weeds that you do have, spray individually with a hand sprayer. Use 2-4D, often sold as Weedone or Weedar, or any "Broad leaf" weed control spray.
- For best control, for next year, spray weeds after the first heavy frost, in the fall.

Quack Grass Control

- Quack Grass is the thick bladed, heavy dark green grass that grows in many lawns. It usually grows faster than other grasses and is very noticeable. It is easily confused with crab grass that spreads out in crab shape, turned upside down.
- For a few clumps here and there, use roundup with a paintbrush on the tall blades.
- Few have crab grass, however some large companies try to sell the public on fertilizer with crab (not quack) grass control. Don't get cheated by them.