

Preparing your Landscape for the Growing Season

By Craig Ruvere and Tony Hahn, Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care

It has been said that, “the energy of the earth flows through the veins of springtime” (Terri Guillemets). It is a time for renewal and rebirth – a time to get outside, get your hands dirty and revel in the miraculous wonders nature has to offer us.

But beyond all the enjoyment, lives the burden of maintaining all those wonders. Green grass doesn’t happen on its own, insects and pests have no boundaries and trees can always benefit from a little spring-cleaning as the growing season begins.

With help from our respected expert, Tony Hahn (Swingle Landscape Care Consultant, Certified Arborist and the “voice of Swingle” – as seen on local Colorado TV stations), we’ve answered some frequently asked questions about how you can help prepare your landscape in the early spring season.

Q: Should I water my lawn over the winter and in early spring?

A: YES. Especially if little to no moisture has been received and Colorado’s blazing sun has been steadily shining. But understand that we’re not suggesting you activate your irrigation system, which could still be susceptible to damage from below freezing temperatures. Watering with a hose-end sprinkler or nozzle is more than acceptable. A short five or ten minute watering will provide enough moisture. Remember to disconnect your hose from the house to prevent future freeze damage until temperatures stay above freezing.

Pay close attention to the south and west facing areas of your lawn (especially if it’s sloping), and around evergreen trees and shrubs. Turf mites are one of the most damaging lawn pests in our area and thrive in dry conditions. Watering over the winter and in early spring will help mitigate turf mite damage by keeping lawn roots healthy, while providing much-needed moisture to evergreens, which are often overlooked.

Q: Should I have my lawn aerated or power-raked?

A: Aeration is critical in the early spring, as root growth tends to accelerate during this time of year. Lawns also grow very quickly from April through June, and need oxygen and nutrients which aeration helps with. Clay soils are predominant in most areas of the Front Range, meaning a spring aeration is vital. By nature, these soils are low-oxygen soils and aeration introduces oxygen into the root zone encouraging optimal growth.

As unsightly as they might be, resist removing the plugs from your lawn after an aeration service is completed. Let them dry out in the sun, then mulch them back into the lawn with your lawn mower. Power-raking is a ruse, we never recommend it. While it may remove dead patches of grass, it also rips out healthy blades just beginning to grow. Mowing with the blade

at its lowest setting will remove the dead grass safely.

Q: Is snow mold a problem in Colorado?

A: YES. We have not seen the problem as common as it's been in recent years. Cooler temperatures prevented the snow from melting, creating the perfect conditions for snow mold growth. Snow mold damages bentgrass lawns more than bluegrass, ryegrass, or tall fescue lawns, which are more common in the Front Range.

We cannot stress enough: when the snow melts away, lightly rake the matted areas of your lawn. This allows air to freely circulate around the grass blades and soil – thus preventing snow mold from becoming a serious problem.

Q: Is a sharp mower blade really that important?

A: YES. Dull mower blades are an invitation for lawn diseases. They also leave your lawn with ragged cuts, which will cause your lawn to dry out faster. Replacing the blade is a good option. If you want to save a little money you can use a metal file to sharpen your blade (once a month is ideal during the heart of the season, if possible). Of course, using a power grinding tool works best if you have one.

If you have a mowing service, make sure to ask them how often they sharpen/replace their blades each season.

Q: When is the best time to fertilize in the spring?

A: We recommend fertilizing a lawn sometime in March after the snow melts, then again in early to mid-May. Most Front Range lawns are “cool-season” grasses, which grow best from April through June. Fertilizing when the grass is growing quickly provides key nutrients at the right time, thickening the turf and promoting deeper root systems – ideal during hotter, drier months. A thick lawn also helps keep weeds from easily growing.

Q: Besides my lawn, do I need to focus any attention on my trees?

A: YES. As your trees emerge from dormancy, you may notice some branches have not survived the winter as new buds are not actively forming. Amazingly, trees know to retain branches that are healthy and strong, while shedding less productive ones. Pruning out dead branches will allow space for the remaining tree to safely and esthetically flourish.

Dead branches serve no purpose to the tree – becoming a safety hazard, while being more prone to disease and decay. Remember, always use safety precautions when pruning dead branches from trees. Contact a professional before you attempt to use rickety ladders and handsaws to get the job done. Safety should always be your first priority.

As earth's energy begins to awaken from winter, we welcome the arrival of the birds singing, the flowers blooming and the yard work returning. But with a few early spring chores, your

landscape will be better prepared for the long-awaited growing season ahead.

Craig Ruvere and Tony Hahn are from Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care, celebrating 70 years of caring for Colorado homes and businesses across the Front Range. Visit myswingle.com for more information.