

Features

4/29/2016

The Green, Green Grass of Home

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For many homeowners, the number-one summer activity isn't swimming, golf or tennis, but cutting the lawn. Summer poses unique lawn-care challenges and draws many consumers to garden centers in search of solutions. Let's review the knowledge and some product possibilities you'll need to extend a helping hand.

To Feed or Not to Feed?

Agronomists preach a slow, steady diet of nutrients to optimize lawn health throughout the year. The popular four-step programs often don't offer enough consistent feeding or coverage to accomplish this. The most popular type of grass seed for homeowners today is turf-type tall fescue, which doesn't need as much food throughout the growing season as other grass types require. Consequently, the nitrogen delivery method is very important. Too much nitrogen delivered too fast is a recipe for disaster. Learn not to burn! Excessive grass growth encourages poor grass health and a clogged mower.

Many state agencies recommend mulching lawns to increase nitrogen levels and reduce waste by recycling the clippings. Most grasses should be mowed higher and more often to shade (cool) the soil, and crowd out undesired weeds. Maintaining a sharp mower blade reduces torn grass blades and decreases disease issues. Today's mulching mowers are designed to shred the blades of grass into finer particles so they decompose into the soil more quickly and easily.

Remember that the type of grass in the lawn also dictates how much food is needed to maintain good turf health. Seek the advice of your county agency or state university on the most common types of grass in your area. Always ask your customer what kind of lawn conditions they have in order to make the most appropriate recommendations. Sun or shade—or both!—is the most common place to begin your discovery of what your customer needs. Signs of clover, pine needles and moss are clear indicators of a low pH or acidic soil. Recommend getting a pH test done before investing in fertilizers. Fast-acting lime products are available to quickly raise acidic soil levels and allow fertilizers to perform as they should.

Organic Feeding Solutions

Although slightly more expensive than traditional chemical fertilizers, organics perform well and won't burn when applied as directed by the product label. Summer favorites like Espoma Organic All-Season Lawn Fertilizer (8-0-0), Espoma Summer Revitalizer (8-0-0) and the OMRI-listed Ringer Lawn Restore (10-0-6) are

ideal for July and August applications. For many regions, Jonathan Green offers a great organic product line, including insect and weed control.

The Espoma products use Bio-Tone microbes to make nutrients easily available to the lawn grasses. Ringer Lawn Restore provides a protein source from all-natural nitrogen that helps grass thrive even in poor growing conditions like dense shade. It also feeds slowly for up to eight weeks, reducing the need to mow the lawn more than once a week.

Weed Controls

Many consumers skip applying a pre-emergent crabgrass control in early spring and, by summer, are faced with lawns covered with crabgrass. Once established, it's tough to eliminate. Mowing the lawn at higher levels paired with a thick, healthy stand of grass tends to crowd out crabgrass (and weeds) naturally. If your customer needs to spray, great products like Bonide Weed Beater Plus and PBI Gordon Trimec Crabgrass Plus, kill not only crabgrass, but also broadleaf weeds, including clover.

If your customer has clover in their lawn, that's another sign of poor nitrogen levels. One favorite product is Bonide Sedge Ender Concentrate, a post-emergent weed killer that eliminates Yellow Nutsedge. Monterey Spurge Power Concentrate is another popular choice.

Disease Controls

Lawn disease controls are harder to come by these days, but a good one to sell is the systemic Bonide Infuse Concentrate or Infuse 32 oz. RTS. It not only prevents, but cures, diseases. Offer to guide your customer through the product label so they better understand how to treat their disease issue. Be sure to distinguish between those products that are curative versus those that are only preventive.

What's Bugging You?

Summer challenges us with insects in the lawn like ants, fleas, crickets, ticks and spiders. Nationally, Bonide offers several quality products to combat these pests. These are available in both liquid spray and granular lawn applications. Always read the label for pet- and child-safety measures when applying any lawn product.

Japanese beetles will emerge and be a nuisance while they forage and mate, only to return to the soil and lay their eggs to begin the cycle with a new generation of lawn-feeding grubs. Consider offering a grub-control product for protection before damage is done in late August and September. There are alternatives to chemistry with the use of beneficial nematodes from Orcon applied to the lawn in early spring when the soil warms. These microscopic organisms seek out and kill destructive grub and beetle larvae that live in the soil.

There are many safe, effective and worry-free options to maintaining a great-looking lawn. Good timing, good cultural sense and always following label directions goes a long way toward helping your customer achieve a lawn that's the envy of the neighborhood. **GP**

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