

April Gardening Guide

The Art of Growing Grass

By Cynthia Brian

“Now every field is clothed with grass, and every tree with leaves; now the woods put forth their blossoms, and the year assumes its gay attire.” ~Virgil

Yes, California passed Proposition 64 last November. However, this column is not about cultivating marijuana, although I am writing about the glories of grass.

Spring is spectacular with its wardrobe of rainbow blooms. Trees are covered with blossoms, the fragrance of freesia engages our nostrils, and the ubiquitous beauty surrounding us is awe-inspiring. We are so blessed that Mother Nature celebrates the rebirth of the seasons with a grand April entrance.

Because of the warmer soil, fall is the best time to plant or reseed a lawn, yet spring runs a close second in popularity. If you haven't torn out your swath of grass in the past few years during our dreadful drought, no doubt you are now looking at a runway of green in your yard thanks to the months of rain. To manage your efforts maintaining the health, beauty and benefits of your lawn for the remainder of the year, get started this month with simple best practices.

Tips to Growing a Lush, Green, Sustainable Turf

- Decide if you want to seed, sod or reseed. Seeding for the first time is best done in autumn when the soil is warm as germination is swifter. You can successfully reseed, overseed and sod in spring, including those irksome bare patches.

- Whichever you choose, your first consideration is to properly prepare your soil. Check the PH level. Ideally lawns should be in the six to seven range. If lower than six, add lime; if higher than seven, add sulfur to bring the PH down.

- Pull the weeds. If you have lots of weeds, keep in mind that weeds mean that the soil conditions are imbalanced. Weeds provide homes and food for microbes but your soil must be improved before your new sod or grass seeds will thrive. Many “weeds” are actually gourmet dinner or tea ingredients including plantain, dandelion, creeping Charlie, mint, mustard, lambs quarter and more.

- Order several yards of enriched soil and compost to be delivered. Ask the yard experts what is their best soil for improving your lawn. Soil is the foundation.

- Add organic fertilizer to accelerate deeper rooting.

- Aerate to loosen the soil. A core aerator will punch holes in the ground to bring air and water to the roots. The finger plugs are to be left on the surface to naturally decompose. Less compaction equals better drainage and absorption.

- Consult your favorite nursery professional for a recommendation on the best seed combinations for you. I'm a huge fan of mixed growth lawns for year around enjoyment. I reseed with Pearl's Premium (www.PearlsPremium.com) interspersed with plugs of isotoma (blue star creeper) and white and red clover. Together they make a very attractive natural rug and the clover is a natural nitrogen supplier. Some people enjoy lawns laced with wild strawberry, violets, mint, or even planted with bulbs.

- You may have to cover reseeded areas with netting to keep the birds away. For small areas, discarded window or door screens work well.

- Let the rainfall do the watering to get your grass established. If it's later in the season when the rain has stopped, water deeply in the morning twice a week or as needed.

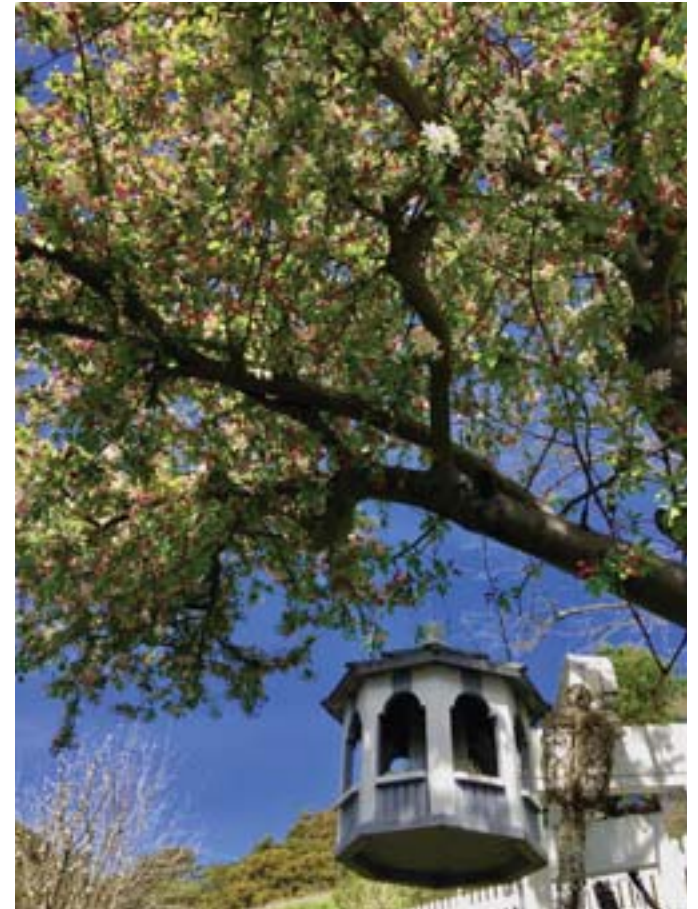
- Mow your lawns with a sharp blade on a high setting without the bag allowing the cut grass to remain on the lawn. This is called grasscycling and is the most beneficial component of cultivating a lush, deep green, thick healthy lawn. If you are buying a new mower, buy a mulch mower, which will chop the grass. Grasscycling allows the clippings to be the fertilizer that provides nutrients to your grass. Scientific research indicates that the content of typical grass clippings by weight is nitrogen (N) 4 percent, potassium (P) 2 percent, and phosphorous (K) .5 percent. By recycling your grass clippings back to your lawn, you use 25 percent less additional fertilizer.

- Mulch the reseeded areas to create a strong turf.

- Stay off the grass while it's growing!

- For those of you who are “Ex-lawn Rangers,” you can create an inviting mosaic with massed groundcovers and low growers including dicentra, ajuga, creeping thyme, golden creeping Jenny, dwarf cinquefoil, or even sedum. You'll need to clip, snip, and maintain. Most groundcovers are not foot-traffic friendly.

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A birdfeeder anchors a flowering crabapple tree.

Photos Cynthia Brian



Blue star grass amidst the fallen petals of peach blossoms.