

Is there a topic more overlooked (and overcooked) than late-season fertilization? It's kind of like flossing your teeth. You know you have to do it, and many times you get the job done. But if you find other things to do on the course, there's no harm and no foul if you don't fertilize.

If you think this way, you couldn't be more wrong.

OK, some of you reading this don't exactly have a late season. You might be facing overseeding or just a change of season. If you are overseeding, then you probably are looking at your "season" beginning when many parts of the country are planning their Christmas vacations.

In the Northern climates, the end game can be about guessing when the ground freezes or when those first snows might come. But for the most part you know when you are done growing grass.

In any climate, fall is a time of change. If you can't feel that change in your bones and in the position of the sun in the sky, then I suggest you need therapy.

Fall represents the best time to line up the agronomic stars. You get to take a breath from summer, and reflect on what was good and what went wrong. Careful analysis of your spring and summer should lead you to a series of decisions.

Fall is the time to take some action and bank yourself some relief points for next summer. Here's where I think turfheads tend to lose the plot, because they don't often take a serious direction based on what happened last summer.

If it has been a particularly trying summer, superintendents tend to just want to move on. The problem is that your turfgrass system has a memory, and the grass plant is now saddled with two key issues: one, heal up from summer's hassles; and two, prepare for the coming winter.

If you don't steer this ship, then one or both of those key areas don't get covered to the dissatisfaction of the turf. So the point is, doing the same thing each and every year just because you flipped the page on your fertilization calendar, is preparing to fail.

Paying Heed to Fall Fertilization

BY DAVE WILBER



FALL REPRESENTS
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Here's my checklist of action items for fall fertility planning. It's more of an If/Then question list thing — like a good diagnosis key.

1. Corrective treatment — Do my fall soil tests (you did get your soil tests done, right?) show any unusual or abnormal conditions that need attention? If yes, take action and make the corrections. If no, move on. If you don't know, shame on you.

2. Environmental stress — Was this year abnormally hot or cold or wet? If yes, do whatever it takes to enhance your plant's physiology and carbohydrate reserves. If no, don't kid yourself. Something is always different.

3. New children — Did you build anything new or rebuild something old? If yes, help those areas catch up and supply plant food and mineral nutrients. If no, count your blessings!

4. Last spring — Did the golf course come out of winter as you expected? If yes, make sure your expectations are high enough. If no, can you identify anything you did or did not do to help out?

5. Test plots — What did last year's semi-formal test plots tell you about other techniques and ideas for late-season fertility? What, no test plots? Again, shame on you. Comparative analysis is critical. What works for others may or may not work for you, and you'll never know where you stand if you don't study.

In conclusion, what you apply now and what you study now could be the key to being a turfgrass hero next summer. The best superintendents I know make this time a time of possibility by knowing what their possibilities are.

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