

Late Is Good, in this Case

Fall fertilization is vital to maintaining healthy turf year-round. Superintendents offer tips on how to do it correctly

Ahh, the smell of fall is in the air. October brings cooler temperatures, colorful leaves, the World Series and ... late-fall fertilization.

Yes, all you tenders of turf, it's time to think about this autumn right of passage. Recently, we asked superintendents: What's the most important thing — whether agronomic or philosophical — to remember when it comes to late-fall fertilization?

Here's what they had to say:

Bryan Tipton, certified superintendent of Sutton Bay in Agar, S.D.:

"I like to put on my late-fall application around Oct. 8 in South Dakota. It's the date of the average first frost in our state. It's also the most important application of the year. The only problem that may occur is a warm-up during this time and a flush of growth that could hurt the plant."

Steve Hammon, superintendent of Traverse City (Mich.) Golf & Country Club:

"The most important item for late-fall and dormant fertilizing in the North is to make sure you're using a product that works well with cool spring and early-summer soil temperatures. You can never predict when your course will be damaged from snow mold, ice damage or crown hydration, so you want a product that encourages quick spring recovery."

John Carlone, certified superintendent of Meadow Brook Club in Jericho, N.Y.:

"The most important thing for superintendents to remember about late-fall fertilization is not to confuse it with dormant fertilization. Late-fall fertilization should take place when shoot growth has ceased but root growth is still taking place — which would be during mid-

to late-October in the New York metro area. Dormant fertilization would take place when both shoot and root growth have shut down for the winter, usually early to mid-December in New York. A dormant fertilization too early or a late-fall fertilization too late could do more harm than good. Then turf would be too succulent entering dormancy."

Don Sutton, superintendent of Kinsale Golf and Fitness Center in Powell, Ohio:

"I like to have all of my fall aerification completed before my late-fall fertilization. I'm targeting root growth with the late-fall application. Having my aerification completed gives channels for air, water and fertilizer to move in the soil as well as good root development in the aerification holes."

Bill Womac, certified superintendent of Big Canoe Golf Club in Norcross, Ga.:

"Fall fertilization on bermudagrass is important to get the turf in the best and healthiest condition for the winter season. We use a fertilizer with low nitrogen, low phosphate and high potassium. The high potassium helps the turf withstand the colder conditions. We use a more complete fertilizer such as 14-4-7 or 16-4-8 for the cool-season grasses. A steady-release nitrogen source is an excellent choice of nitrogen for the fall season. Fertilizing cool-season grass in the fall will improve the root growth vs. late-spring applications."

Jim Husting, certified superintendent of Woodbridge (Calif.) Golf & Country Club:

"I would have to say — wherever you are — to do fall fertilization to promote strength for recovery and transition into the spring."

Compiled by Editor Larry Aylward.

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