

Personal Message

The end of summer always seems like a sad time for me. I'm not sure why.

The end of winter is the just the opposite. I'm always happy when those final icy cold days melt into something warmer.

Yes, I know that there is still plenty of warm weather left. There are no school age children in our home. We don't have to make that Herculean back to school effort that parents undergo.

So, I'm not sure why I get the blues, but I'm always a little mopey around this time of year. It may have something to do with the fact that my fishing days are getting fewer and further between. I'll always lament "The Big One" that got away.

We were fortunate enough to spend a fair amount of time at our little trailer in Ocean City this year. And, I finally wore Melissa down with my constant pestering. She went surf fishing on Assateague Island with me last month.

I suppose I should preface this story with the disclaimer that Melissa is not much for fishing, camping or those types of outdoor activities. During the course of the summer, she's managed to plead out of several planned fishing trips.

However, my birthday arrived in early August. Melissa has always been extremely generous with birthday gifts, but this year, I was having none of her usual largesse. I requested that she accompany me to Assateague early one morning. And, when I say early, I mean it. I usually hit the beach in time to see the sun rise.

To her credit, Melissa was a really good sport. Early in the morning, on the day after my birthday, off we went for a morning of sport fishing.

Although she didn't do a lot of actual fishing, Melissa professes that she had a great time.

She got to see the wildlife on Assateague, including the wild ponies and miniature deer. Dolphins were swimming near us that day.

We walked on the beach, cooked breakfast on a small camp stove and read books. I even had kites and a game of horseshoes stashed in my Toyota jeep, in case I needed to keep her from getting bored. She said she had a ball and wants to return as soon as possible.

Although we didn't even get a nibble, it was one of the best times we ever had.

Now, there's lots of activity going on in our company. Fall usually rivals the springtime months in terms of being our busiest time of year. So I'll treasure these summer memories while I get ready for autumn.

September Garden Tips

- You may want to consider bringing plants indoors toward the end of the month. Watch the weather forecast and bring them inside gradually. Don't overwater your plants when bringing them back inside. And, you may want to repot them if they've outgrown their current container.
- Last year, we planted between 400-500 daffodil and tulip bulbs outside our office. We're adding to the collection this fall. We'll be installing about the same amount again this year. The colors were unbelievable last spring. For a small amount of money in bulbs now, you'll have a spectacular show next year.
- Another inexpensive way of adding plant material to your landscape beds is to divide your existing plants. Many perennials including peonies, daylilies and tall garden phlox are ready to be divided this fall. Dig the old clumps out with a spade and split the crown area into several pieces. Each area should contain several "eyes" and part of the roots. Plant about 2-3 inches deep in a prepared landscape bed.

Aeration

I'd like to provide you with a definition of lawn aeration and why it has such a proven track record of success.

Core aeration is probably the single most important cultural practice that can be done for your lawn.

It's a process that relieves compaction of the soil. Aerating your soil allows much needed nutrients to get to the root zone more quickly and efficiently.

The need for aerating a lawn generally stems from compacting the soil. Heavy foot traffic, cars and sports activities may be the cause of compaction.

Also, properties in this area usually have a lot of clay in the soil. Typically, the more clay, the more susceptible your lawn is to compaction.

We aerate large properties with an attachment on our tractor. Smaller properties and tight spaces are pushed off with a motorized hand aerator.

Core aeration will leave a "plug" of soil on the surface of the lawn that makes the ground appear to have been plowed. These plugs are usually about 3-4 inches deep. However, the plugs will break down in one or two weeks and disappear back into the soil.

Aeration allows water and nutrients to better penetrate to the grass roots. Also, if you have a problem with pooling water or grading issues, aeration can help trap the water and absorb it more quickly.

What Happened to My Topsoil?

We're beginning our annual review of the lawns that we've cared for during the past growing season. As you might imagine, harsh weather plays a major factor in the success of a healthy lawn.

Despite the rainy spring and dry summer, most of our lawns survived the excesses of our Eastern Shore weather fairly well. Our top performing lawns are those that I have renovated during previous autumns.

The single biggest challenge that I and other lawn renovation specialists face is the lack of viable organic material in the soil. You may not realize it, but whenever a new home is built in today's world, the top layer of soil is usually scraped off and sold for a handsome profit.

Some contractors may actually scrape your topsoil aside and "reserve" it for use later. However, when it's replaced, you'll usually find that it's been mixed with subsoil, rocks and other undesirable materials. After your construction is complete, the contractor may regrade using this mixture.

However, you're going to find it's a very unhealthy medium for growing flowers and plants, much less a healthy lawn.

It may be years before you realize the type of damage that occurs from removal of this top layer. Usually, your first indication is when you can't get grass to grow.

Topsoil has to be removed for grading purposes. That's an undisputable fact. Your contractor is installing foundation work, septic systems and perhaps even a basement. He's also grading the property so that drainage problems won't occur in the future.

However, removal of this layer of soil also removes the necessary nutrients that grass needs to grow. We can determine this by doing a simple and inexpensive soil test. Quite often, I am forced to add new topsoil to a property that has experienced recent construction or renovation.

When I am called upon to fix this type of situation, we are often forced to import topsoil. I always insist on using compost amended topsoil. This topsoil is a bit more expensive than the normal grade of soil. However, the benefits from adding compost are well worth it.

Most lawn renovations don't require this type of drastic measure. And, you may only need to touch up trouble spots. However, if additional topsoil is necessary, fortunately, it's a one-time expense. If you'd like further information about compost amended topsoil, don't hesitate to give us a call.