

## Get out the spreader 1 more time

Before you retire your lawn-care equipment for the winter, one last task remains: a final lawn fertilization.

Turfgrass specialists at Michigan State University advise applying a high nitrogen fertilizer to dormant lawns before the soil freezes. Fertilizing in the late fall helps thicken weak or sparse turf and strengthens the turf to withstand the winter. More importantly, it promotes root development that will strengthen the lawn in the coming year. It also provides the nu-





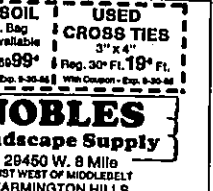
trients that grass plants will use to green up slowly without a lot of top-growth the next spring. This means you aren't running for the lawn mower every couple of days and mowing when the soil is too wet. Because clippings are fewer, you can return them rather than remove them from the lawn.

Growth that occurs after fertilization could leave the turf more susceptible to winter injury. But this is not likely if you apply fertilizer at the recommended rates after the grass

has stopped growing. This is usually about the first or second week of November in most of lower Michigan.

Although the possibility is remote, a heavy rain just after application could result in some water pollution by fertilizer runoff. To avoid this, put on no more than 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. On sandy soils, cut that to ½ pound. If it's available, use fast-release nitrogen — urea or ammonium nitrate. Slow-release forms are more expensive and their nutrients are not available to the

plants during late November and December when roots can still grow and develop. Fertilizing before the ground freezes reduces the potential for runoff. Applying the fertilizer carefully with a spreader is also important. Fertilizer carelessly scattered on pavement and other hard surfaces goes straight into storm sewers or ground water. Turf is a thick mat. Fertilizer that gets through that tangle to the soil in quantities that meet but don't exceed the lawn's needs is not likely to go much farther.

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