

SOLUTIONS TO COMMON LAWN PROBLEMS

The best prevention for all lawn problems is a thick, healthy, consistently fed lawn. Sky recommends feeding 3-4 times a year with an organic lawn food such as **Whitney Farms** or **Dr. Earth**. The recommended feeding schedule is :

- Valentine's Day
- Memorial Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving

The most important feedings are in the fall and early spring.

CRANEFLIES

The large mosquito-like insects seen in late summer are egg-laying adult craneflies. Eggs hatch into larvae (½" to 1 ½" gray-brown worms) that feed on turf grasses until cold weather drives them down into the soil where they stay dormant until spring. Damage appears as large irregularly-shaped dead areas, usually in April or May. Treatments can be applied in the fall, but spring is usually more effective. **Beneficial nematodes** and **Green Light Spinosad** can help to control craneflies organically. **Bayer Advanced Season Long Grub Control** is a chemical control. For more information, see a Sky Nursery employee.

DROUGHT

Here in the Puget Sound area, we normally get most of our water in the winter. In the summer we may have long periods without rain. In some years, that period may last several months. During dry spells, only 1 to 2 inches of water per week is necessary. If you use a sprinkler, use a wide shallow container to measure the water you're putting on. Remember, long slow soakings once or twice a week are best. If water seems to be running off rather than soaking in, aerating your lawn may help. **E-Z-Wet** or **Perc-o-late** can help water penetrate deeply and then "wick" back up when needed—for best results apply in late spring and soak it in. You may want to reapply during the summer.

Setting your mowing height higher can reduce water needs by shading the ground and promoting deeper root growth. Improving your soil with extra compost can also promote deeper root growth and increased drought resistance. Healthy turf will weather drought stress better, so make sure your grass starts the summer in good shape by following a good fertilizing and liming schedule. Do not fertilize with a fast-release (chemical) fertilizer if a drought is anticipated! Fast-release fertilizer could encourage a growth spurt that would leave your turf susceptible to damage if watering is restricted.

GREENING UP A BROWN LAWN

The party's Sunday—how do I get my lawn looking good FAST?? Sky carries several products that will help green-up a lawn quickly provided it is not completely dormant. Do not try to fertilize a dormant lawn (one that is already brown). The only thing that will revitalize a dormant lawn is water, and lots of it. If your lawn is not dormant, Sky carries several products that will quickly improve its color and lushness. **Lilly Miller Chelated Iron Plus Fertilizer** and **Scott's Liquid Fertilizer** are liquids, **Miracle-Gro Lawn Food** a soluble powder; all are sprayed on and

absorbed by grass roots and blades. Sky does not recommend them in place of a regular (preferably organic) fertilizer program, but they are good for fast results.

MOSS

Moss in the lawn is a common, easily cured problem. It develops chiefly when the grass is stressed for one or more of four reasons:

1. Low soil fertility (lawn needs more fertilizer).
2. Soil too moist (lawn needs better drainage).
3. Soil too acid/ low pH (lawn needs more lime).
4. Too much shade.

First kill the existing moss by using **Lilly Miller Moss-Out**, **Safer Moss & Algae Control**, or **Worry Free Moss & Algae Control**, or a fertilizer/moss control combination. To help prevent moss from coming back, aerate yearly or every other year, apply dolomite lime each spring, and follow a regular fertilizing schedule. Lime not only stabilizes the pH, it also adds the nutrients calcium and magnesium, which are leached out by our heavy winter rains. Shade is best dealt with by limbing-up or thinning out trees and shrubs, and by yearly reseeding with more shade-tolerant grasses such as **Sky's Custom Shade Blend** or **Play and Fun Blend**.

MUSHROOMS/FAIRY RING

There are currently no chemical controls available to discourage mushrooms. Lime is not effective against fungi. Mushrooms do not harm anything; if objectionable they can be picked or mowed. You can also drench the area with a wetting agent such as **E-Z-Wet** or **Perc-o-late**. To apply, punch holes 4-6" deep about one foot apart throughout the affected areas. Thoroughly water in. For the next month, drench the area daily using about one to two quarts of water per square foot.

RED THREAD

Red thread is a common Northwest turf fungus spread by wind and rain during conditions of high humidity and cool weather when grass is growing slowly. It appears as areas of cream to pink fuzz over irregular patches of lawn. Underfed and underlimed turf is most susceptible to it. Although the disease is not fatal, it can make your grass look rather sad. The best treatment is to mow 30% shorter than usual (collect and dispose of clippings) and give the lawn a good application of fertilizer and lime to help it outgrow the fungus. Continue to feed every 30 to 60 days until the red thread is gone. When watering, long infrequent soakings are best. If chemical control is needed, **Bonide Fungenil**, **Bayer Advanced Fungus Control**, and **Fung-Away** are listed as preventative controls. Some studies have shown that organically-fed lawns are less susceptible to the problem.

RESEEDING

Reseeding/renovating your lawn may be done in April, May, June, September, or October. First, aerate any compacted areas with a device that removes plugs of dirt, and thatch if necessary. Mow the lawn about 30% shorter than normal. Fill in any low spots with **Sky Premium Planting Mix**; if the depth of the fill is more than 2", roll with a partially-filled water roller to compact the soil. Apply seed, lime, and starter fertilizer, cover with peat moss or **Gardner & Bloome Soil**

Building Compost, and thoroughly water. **Keep moist for 2-4 weeks**. Fertilize again in about a month with a regular lawn fertilizer—NOT a Weed and Feed.

THATCH

Over time some lawns develop a layer of old roots and grass stems between the grass and the soil surface called “thatch”. If this layer becomes too thick ($\frac{3}{4}$ ” or more), water, air, and fertilizer cannot reach the grass roots and the lawn begins to thin out, especially in the summer. Keeping your grass mowed to a uniform height (2-3”) year round and using an organic fertilizer such as **Whitney Farms** or **Dr. Earth** can help prevent thatch from accumulating. If your soil is in good shape, grass blades do not contribute to thatch because they are 99% water and fertilizer. If you mow without a grass catcher, mow more frequently so that the cut blades are smaller, and keep your mower sharp.

If you do have a problem layer of thatch, remove it with a thatching rake or a power thatcher. For heavy buildups, cross-raking will be necessary. The lawn will look thin and sparse, but it will quickly generate new growth. Then follow the directions for **RESEEDING**.

WEEDS

Many common lawn weeds (e.g. dandelions) are effectively controlled though consistent fertilization. They thrive under conditions of low fertility. **Broadleaf weeds** are best controlled from late spring through early fall by physical removal or by a weed killer. Granular weed and feed products work on the larger leaf weeds like dandelions but not on small leaf plants like clover. Liquid weed killers/herbicides such as **Lilly Miller Lawn Weed Killer™** used on **warm, dry days** work on both. **Most herbicides work best at temperatures between 65° and 80°**. **Bonide** has developed a lawn weed killer, **Weed Beater Ultra™**, which is effective in cooler temperatures (down to 45°F). Follow label directions carefully, particularly regarding rain or watering. Also, remember that any herbicide can affect reseeding; read your labels for more information.

Weed grasses must be dug out or spot treated with a glyphosate product (**Roundup** or **Kilzall**). These spots may be reseeded immediately if dug or about ten days after herbicide treatment. Unfortunately, there is no product that kills undesirable grasses without also destroying desirable ones! **Scott’s Halts Crabgrass Preventer** can help if used early in the year. **Halts** cannot be used if you are reseeding your lawn.

There is now an organic product available to prevent weed seed germination—corn gluten. Sky carries the brand **Concern Weed Prevention Plus**. Corn gluten acts as an organic “weed & feed”; it feeds your existing grass while suppressing seed germination. Remember, though, any pre-emergent herbicide, including corn gluten, will not kill existing weeds and can’t be used in areas you are reseeding (it will prevent lawn seed germination as well). Two or three applications between April and October are needed to control weed grasses like annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*).

OTHER PROBLEMS

For problems not covered, please talk to us at **Sky Nursery** and we can help you deal with them in an environmentally sound, cost-effective manner.