



Spring Lawn & Garden Tips

By Steve Marler

Steve Marler, a Hugo native and the manager of Hugo Feed Mill and Hardware has been helping local residents for over 30 years with lawn and garden advice and solutions.

LAWN CARE:

What an unusual winter we just had! Coming off of last winter when we had record breaking snow totals, to this year getting more snow in the last week in March than we'd had all winter up to this point. With the lack of snow cover for most of this winter it may or may not affect our lawns. Snow mold pressure may be lower this year, but the risk of other winter injury is still there. The lack of insulating snow cover can mean lower soil temperatures and increased winter desiccation (drying out). We won't know the extent of any winter injury (if any) for several weeks when things come out of dormancy.

How does your lawn look this spring? Last summer's drought did cause many unlucky lawns to go dormant and if areas of your yard didn't show signs of recovery with last fall's rains, odds are these areas may have died out completely and you will need to re-seed.

As spring approaches, everyone is eager to get outside and work on their yards. But wait! When it comes to your lawn, retain your enthusiasm and slowly ease into the spring season. Let's start with some Do's and Don'ts for early spring.

DO NOT

- **Hard Rake:** Hard raking too early opens your lawn up for disease and compaction due to wet soil.
- **Plug Aerate or Power Rake:** Your lawn is still recovering from the winter. Imagine you're just waking up in the morning and someone blows a fog horn before your feet have even touched the ground. What a rude awakening! Your grass, like you, needs time to wake up. If you feel that you have to dethatch or plug aerate, wait until you've mowed your lawn 2-3 times to ensure a fast recovery for your grass.
- **Fertilize Early:** If you fertilized in the fall and your lawn is well established, there's no need to apply fertilizer in April or early

May. The exception would be if you had a crabgrass problem last year and in that case simply sign-up for our "Timely Tips" newsletter on the Hugo Feed Mill web site and we'll email you an alert when it's time to apply crabgrass preventer. Now let's walk through what you should be doing...

DO

- **Clean Up:** Pick up sticks, litter, and pet waste. Sweep off sand, rock, and debris from hard surfaces to prevent it from ending up in the storm sewer.
- **Light Raking:** When the soil is dry, rake lightly — especially if there are issues with snow mold.
- **Seeding:** Spring is a good time to start seeding as soon as it's dry enough to work the soil, especially in shaded areas. This allows new seed ample time to establish itself before the tree leaves are fully out. To figure out the correct amount and type of seed, you will just need to know the square footage of the area and if it is primarily shady or sunny.
- **Plan:** Start a lawn folder with a detailed map of your yard including square footage. Keep receipts and take notes on the date, type and amount of the products you apply. Everything starts with the soil and it's a good idea to get it tested to know how to correctly fertilize your lawn. We are happy to assist you with your soil sample and can fill out the paperwork, prepare the soil, and send it out for testing.

VEGETABLE GARDENS:

Over the years we have worked with novices to the experienced gardeners each spring. They are all excited about their gardens! If you haven't already, make this the year you start a garden journal. Write down notes or observations about what worked and what didn't. Next year, you'll have a guide and won't need to reinvent the wheel.

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Similar to lawn care, starting a garden takes planning. How large of a space will you utilize? Where do you get the most sun? What would you like to grow? What does your family like to eat? Do you have deer and rabbits that you'll need to keep from munching your produce? Answering these questions will help you decide what to plant and where. Regardless of what you choose to grow, a healthy garden starts with quality soil. To test if your garden is dry enough, shape a handful of dirt into a ball and poke it. If it crumbles into smaller pieces, it's ready. If it doesn't break, wait to plant. To find out exactly what your soil needs to produce the best harvest before all of your hard work, we strongly suggest soil testing.

Testing Your Soil

If you look at your lawn and it clearly needs help, where should you start? Everything begins with the soil, so let's dig in!

First, decide if you're going to revitalize your existing lawn or till up your yard and start over. If you choose to start over, collect samples from between a depth of 0-6" and for existing lawns take samples from the 0-3" depth range. Be sure to take samples from at least 5 different areas to get the most accurate results. To test the soil in your garden, use the same process taking samples from 0-6" deep.

Once you have your samples, discard the surface grass and mix all of the soil together. I tell customers to bring me about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a gallon ice cream pail full to ensure we have a good representation of your soil.

If you do notice major differences in certain areas (for example, you have issues in the front yard but not in the back), it may be best to gather samples and test each area separately. This time of year it can take up to 2-3 weeks or more to receive your results, so I recommend gathering your samples as soon as the ground thaws. In some cases while we wait, I'll advise planting your grass seed or garden along with a starter fertilizer and we can make the needed adjustments later once we have your results. With an established lawn, we recommend applying fertilizer in late May/early June and by then, you will have your soil results to customize that fertilizing.

When it comes to taking care of our lawns and gardens, there are plenty of variables we can't control. However, a soil test can help you save time and avoid needless frustration by empowering you with valuable information you can use to plan for success!

For more info visit soiltest.cfans.umn.edu

Remember, you don't have to figure this out on your own. We're here at Hugo Feed Mill & Hardware to guide you from start to finish and I've helped many families with their lawns and gardens over generations. I don't preach a '5 Step Program' for your lawn because not everyone's soil is the same. Simply take a few minutes on a nice day to measure your lawn and gardens. All your decisions — from seeds, fertilizer, herbicides etc. — are based on square footage and soil type. With that information, I can customize a plan based on your overall needs. Our reputation is built on your results. Stop by Hugo Feed Mill & Hardware to ask any remaining questions!

