

## LAWN AERATION

Aerating the lawn is an excellent way to alleviate thatch and compaction problems that can predispose a lawn to serious health problems. It is also an excellent way to alter the negative cultivation effects of soil layering on lawns. The best time to do aeration is spring or fall. The reason is that the lawn will recover quickly after aeration during these times. The soil should have enough moisture for the aeration to be effective. Overly dry or coarse soil does not lend itself to aeration.

In repeated tests, researchers at Michigan State University have compared aerators, sometimes called coring machines, to the traditional thatching machines, which beat loose thatch out of the turf. The results are always the same. The aerators do a much better job.

All aerators work by penetrating through the turf and deeply into the soil, allowing better air, water, and nutrient uptake. Machines with hollow tines remove actual cores of soil. This is effective, or at least partially effective, on heavy clay soils. By removing sections of soil and thatch, rapid root growth is encouraged. The holes may be left open or filled in with topsoil.

Aerators that merely divot the soil, although better than traditional thatching machines, are not as effective as hollow core aerators in alleviating compaction problems. This is particularly true on clay soils. The research also indicates that the closer the spaces and longer the tines, the better the aerator works.

Do not be shocked by your lawn's appearance right after coring. It will not look real tidy. The lawn will be dotted with small plugs all over the surface. You can rake these up and add them to the compost pile, mow over them, or just leave them. In a few weeks, they will decompose and vanish.

Fertilize the lawn within a few days of aerating. Within two weeks or so, new roots will be filling in the holes and the lawn will be noticeably more vigorous. Aeration may be advisable about every other year.

The **Master Gardener Hotline** is open from April to October, Monday through Friday. Lines are available 9:00 am to noon and 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm at 888-678-3464

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