



## **You Can Have a Golf-Course-Quality Backyard**

### *Eight Steps to a Great Lawn*

Many of us are as amazed by a golf tournament's beautifully maintained fairways and greens as we are by the players' drives and putts. But for millions of homeowners, turning a backyard into a golf-course-quality green space is a springtime dream that seems just out of reach.

The good news? Thanks to a new generation of easy-to-operate mowing equipment, a lush, manicured lawn is within most people's grasp. According to turf expert Paul B. Latshaw, using the right tools and techniques will help ensure that your lawn stays golf-course vibrant all year long. As golf course superintendent, Latshaw has prepared great-looking tournament-quality grass for the past 15 years.

"Turning your attention to the turf in early spring makes all the difference," says Latshaw, who has led the golf course turf preparations for three PGA events including the 2004 and 2005 Memorial Tournaments at Muirfield Village Golf Club, Jack Nicklaus's home course. "A little work now will really pay off throughout the season," he says. Latshaw teamed with the lawn care experts at Lawn-Boy to offer these eight tips to help turn your backyard into a space that will have your neighbors turning green with envy:

**Get your equipment into shape.** Golf course maintenance crews rely on their equipment to be in tip-top shape. Homeowners should expect the same type of performance. After sitting unused for several months, your mower will probably need a little TLC. Spring is the perfect time to check and change the oil, air filter, and spark plug or plugs. Also, be sure to check to see if your blade needs sharpening or replacing. If you're not up to the task, or simply don't have the time, contact your local dealer to schedule a spring tune-up.

**Use the right mower.** The pros rely on top-quality, high-performing equipment to maintain perfect-looking grass. If your mower didn't perform up to your expectations last year, it may be time to invest in some new equipment. Today, higher-end models combine professional-level effectiveness with lots of user-friendly features, including easier starting. When designing its new line of mowers, Lawn-Boy interviewed hundreds of homeowners and used their feedback to come up with innovative features like an easily adjustable handle height, a bag you can remove with just one hand, and a self-propel system that automatically senses and adjusts to your walking speed up to five miles per hour. For more information about premium mowers designed to meet your needs, visit [www.lawn-boy.com](http://www.lawn-boy.com).

**Clean up debris.** When the lawn begins to wake up for the season, go over it lightly with a rake to clear leaves, twigs, and other debris left over from the fall. Spending some time in the yard very early in the season will also help you detect early signs of disease or pest infestation and determine if there is any winter damage that needs to be repaired. .

**Fix bare spots.** You probably don't have divots in your backyard, but you might notice a few unsightly bare spots that need fixing due to disease or pets. They're easy to repair: Just clear away the dead-looking patches, sprinkle grass seed on the newly exposed soil, add fertilizer, and keep the area moist.

**Cut at the right height.** Most of the year, keep your mowing height set high – around three to three-and-a-half inches for most types of grass. This will help prevent cutting off too much of the critical food-producing parts of the grass blade. Keeping grass tall increases its tolerance to heat and stress, and also crowds out weeds. But during the first mowing of the season, cut down to about two to two-and-a-half inches to remove dead, brown grass and fungus that may have taken hold over the winter, leaving only the healthy part of the plant behind.

**Water.** Water is one of the most vital elements for a healthy lawn. Contrary to popular belief, watering at night is not the best option. Watering at night causes the grass canopy to remain moist for the longest amount of time. This creates a breeding ground for disease. The best time to water is in the early morning so that the grass can benefit from its a.m. drink throughout the day.

**Aerate.** Golf courses aerate regularly to relieve compaction. Most home lawns can benefit from this procedure as well. Mature lawns can often become compacted, reducing the ability of critical nutrients to reach grass roots. Aerating helps loosen the soil, letting water, air and fertilizer make it down to the grass plant's roots. Manual tools work well for small yards or trouble spots. If you've got a large yard, consider renting a power aerator with a group of your neighbors.

**Fertilize.** Fertilizing is an important step toward creating a golf-course-quality lawn. But before you fertilize, invest in a soil test to determine exactly what kind of nutrients your soil needs. Once you've chosen a fertilizer with the right blend of nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium for your yard, make sure you stick to the suggested application instructions so you don't under- or overfeed your lawn.

The bottom line, Latshaw says, is to spend a little bit of time and energy at the beginning of the season to lay the groundwork for a dense, healthy lawn. "Mother Nature will do most of the work," he says. "But there are plenty of things you can do to help her along."

By choosing the right equipment and making sure your lawn gets the proper amount of food, water, and attention, you'll be well on your way to cultivating a lush, vibrant backyard even the most demanding turf expert will admire.