

# B.E.S.T. Lawns News

Building Environmentally Sustainable Turf

## Fall 2022 Edition

[pwcva.gov/bestlawns](http://pwcva.gov/bestlawns)



### Message from the BEST Lawns Coordinator:

Fall is a busy time for many of us, especially when it comes to our lawns! In between maintenance tasks take some time to relax and enjoy the fall weather with many events in the area. For plant sales and other activities to inspire your lawn and landscape see page 7!

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# Your Questions on Lime... Answered.



Liming is one of the most misunderstood lawn care practices and yet, if it's needed, can lead to remarkable results when applied correctly. So how do you know if you do need to apply lime and what's the best way to use it? Read on for tips, tricks, and more about lime. Have more questions that we didn't cover here? Contact [BESTlawns@pwcgov.org](mailto:BESTlawns@pwcgov.org)

- **What is lime and why do I need it?**

Lime is made from quarried stone (limestone or dolomite) which is ground, heated, and then processed into the lime products that we're familiar with. High quality stone is quarried from multiple locations worldwide including within the United States. Lime is applied to lawns to raise the pH when soils are too acidic (and used for a variety of other industrial activities).

- **What exactly is pH?**

It is a measurement of reactive hydrogen and aluminum that conveys how acidic or alkaline a substance is. pH ranges from 0-14 with 7 being a 'neutral' value that is neither basic nor acidic. Lawns prefer a pH of about 6.5, if the pH is slightly higher or lower it won't cause too much of an effect, but if pH is significantly low, your lawn is not able to get some of the nutrients that it needs from the soil while other nutrients may be available in excess. Generally, Virginia soils that are not limed are moderately to strongly acidic.

- **How can I tell if my pH is low/acidic?**

Taking a sample of your soil and getting it tested is your best tool available to check your pH. This is important for other planting projects and not only grasses, as many plants have specific pH requirements and can suffer if they are planted in soils with the wrong pH.

*[continued on page 3]*

References for this article:

- [https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/452/452-510/SPES-158.pdf](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/452/452-510/SPES-158.pdf)
- <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/soil-acidity-and-liming-basic-information-for-farmers-and-gardeners>
- <https://www3.epa.gov/ttnchie1/ap42/ch11/final/c11s17.pdf>

# Your Questions on Lime... Answered, continued

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- **Can't I just apply lime every year?**

No— you definitely want to apply lime only when it is indicated with a soil test. If you participate in the BEST Lawns program, we'll write a nutrient plan for you that includes the amount of lime to apply **once** over the three year length of the plan. Soils being too alkaline can also cause significant problems, (and is challenging to correct, often requiring the help of professionals to make an application of Sulphur to slowly decrease the pH).

- **What is the difference between dolomitic and calcitic lime?**

If your magnesium is low, you want to apply dolomitic lime which contains higher quantities of this nutrient. If your calcium is low, you want to make sure to apply calcitic lime which contains more calcium. If neither of these situations applies to your yard, both of these types of lime will work equally well on your home lawn.

- **Then how about pelletized versus ground lime?**

Pelletized lime comes with a slightly higher price tag but is easier to apply as it is significantly easier to see the lime pellets that you've left behind, easier to use standard equipment to apply, and there is less risk of an over-application. Ground lime is often considered to be slightly more effective as its higher amount of surface area and contact with the soil will allow it to become incorporated more readily.

- **Can I use 'fast-acting' lime products instead of traditional lime?**

You can- fast acting lime will get you quicker results but will stick around for less time. Although most lime applications will likely need to be repeated in the future, generally applications of agricultural lime result in raised pH for about 3 years or more while fast-acting lime will need to be purchased and applied more regularly.

- **Why is there a limit on the amount of lime that I can apply at one time?**

Sometimes this can be frustrating to property owners who need to apply large quantities of lime to more acidic soil. Soils can only absorb lime at a rate of 50 lbs. per 1000 square feet, any more than this will not be absorbed into the soil leading to run off of the product which can adversely affect natural areas. If you have more than 50 lbs. to apply make sure to follow a planned application schedule and wait at least 30 days between any additional applications. For large lawn areas one option is to prioritize portions of the yard to focus on for renovation to reduce the overall amount of lime needed at once.

- **Is there any time that I can't apply lime?**

Unlike lawn fertilizer, lime can be applied at almost any time of year— except when the ground is frozen (applying in the rain should also be avoided).

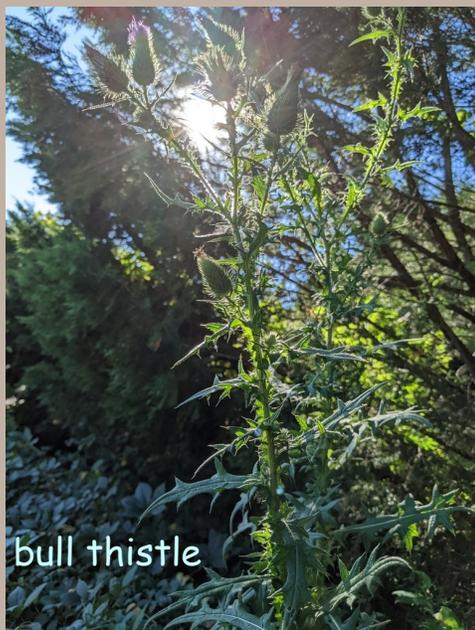
- **What equipment do I need to apply lime?**

You'll need either a rotary or drop spreader, just like you would use for fertilizer. Some finely ground lime may need to be applied with more specialized equipment— consult the label. You will calibrate your spreader to give you the proper rate of application. See more on calibration [here](#).

- **Any other tips?**

If you haven't checked your pH lately it is definitely recommended, fertilizer applied to soils with improper pH can have little to no effect on your lawn; so taking the time to sample your soil and amending with lime if needed can have significant results.

# Which weeds to tackle this fall →



bull thistle

A weed is generally defined as a plant that is ‘out of place’ or otherwise undesired. Fall is a great time to address many common weeds using cultural practices, (like cutting your lawn at a higher height), mechanically removing weeds by pulling, or using herbicides responsibly where needed, (*following all label instructions*).

Identification is the first step to good management. After weeds have been confirmed, determine if there’s enough present to be a problem. If so, check to see if there is an ideal time that they should be removed or treated. Often, determining when weeds are actively growing, storing nutrients or looking for periods where there is less risk to non-target plants and animals are common considerations that influence timing of management decisions.

**\*Note– if you plan to add additional grass seed to your lawn this fall you likely need to wait to apply herbicides– follow label instructions to not jeopardize your new grass seedlings.\***

These are some common weeds that you can manage in the fall: (all images below courtesy of Virginia Tech Weed ID Clinic <https://weedid.cals.vt.edu/> ):

## Pre-emergent Herbicides:

These are useful when you have large areas of weed species that may be challenging to remove by hand or by post emergent products. Timing is critical for these applications and may vary slightly between species as you want to be sure to target these plants *before* they begin to emerge.



## Annual Bluegrass

Use a pre-emergent herbicide in late summer and early fall as temps start to cool. If you are overseeding the same areas, remember that this will kill your new grass as well. Consider waiting to manage annual bluegrass after it starts growing with the active ingredient mesotrione instead when seedlings are a concern.

Reference for this article: (check this out also for more weeds to target!)

[https://ext.vt.edu/lawngarden/turfandgardentips/tips/Fall\\_lawn\\_weed\\_control\\_strategies.html](https://ext.vt.edu/lawngarden/turfandgardentips/tips/Fall_lawn_weed_control_strategies.html)

# Which weeds to tackle this fall →

## Pre-emergent Herbicides: Continued

### Broadleaf Annuals:

Winter growing 'broadleaf' annuals like bittercress and chickweed can be managed by pre-emergent products with the active ingredient isoxaben in late summer/early fall. Although this targets non grass species, young grass can still be affected, follow label timing.



**\*\*Note:** While many of these plants can appear weedy, most of these do provide significant benefits to wildlife, especially pollinators and birds. Consider leaving some of these plants in areas where turf does not need to be as dense.

### Post-emergent Herbicides:

Are used primarily for spot treatments of undesired species when mechanical management is challenging *after* species have emerged, timing remains important.

### Winter Annuals:

These plants tend to die shortly after producing seed and as it warms in the spring. Pull young plants or apply herbicides when needed before bloom or seed set in winter to reduce additional plant spread. Plants like chickweeds, henbit, bittercress, and shepherd's purse are all in this category.



### Perennials best managed in Fall:

Lasting several years, these plants can have more established root systems, so using tools like weed pullers can help to remove them. Timing is important to control these plants when they are most susceptible to chemicals. Plants like dandelion, plantains, mock strawberry, and chicory are examples.



Recommended herbicides suitable for use in lawns and proper timing for application can be found in *Virginia Tech's Home Grounds and Animals 2022 Guide*, contact **Virginia Cooperative Extension Prince William Unit** with any questions.

# How to Tick “Proof” your Yard

... or how to reduce ticks.

Lawns are valued for many reasons; a place to play, a walkway between gardens, and an attractive landscaping asset. Yet another added value of a well maintained and healthy lawn is its ability to reduce the likelihood of encountering one of our most dangerous vectors of disease, ticks.

Several tick borne pathogens that cause infections like Lyme disease are on the rise in Virginia according to the Virginia Department of Health. These infection rates are thought to be growing in part due to increased education and reporting, but also due to land use and climate changes that expand the range of certain tick species and the animals that ticks feed on, (their hosts).



Often ticks are thought to be associated with parks and wild areas and yet our yards are also a likely place of exposure, particularly as our local forests become more fragmented and more ecotone or edge habitat is exposed. This can encourage tick hosts including deer and white footed mice to frequent our yards and neighborhoods.

So what can property owners do to make yards less tick friendly while still providing important wildlife support by creating and preserving habitat?

While there is no way to completely “tick proof” areas we can consider tick and host biology to outline a few easy steps to limit your risk:

- 1) Ticks are very prone to desiccation and when they can, they prefer to stay in the moister confines of leaf litter or dense vegetation when they’re not feeding. Well maintained lawns are drier than brushy and wooded areas and subsequently lead to less tick activity.
- 2) Maintaining turf in areas of your yard that you frequently spend time in (or using other ground covers that would remain drier like native sedges) is recommended to reduce exposure.

## References:

- <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-epidemiology/bugs-human-health/?tab=3>
- <http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/home/it-is-always-a-good-time-to-be-on-the-lookout-for-ticks-how-to-avoid-and-manage-these-troublesome-pests>
- <https://extension.psu.edu/programs/master-gardener/counties/pike/news/2017/creating-a-tick-resistant-garden>

## Steps to Reduce Ticks continued.

2) Maintaining both leaf litter and edge habitat is highly beneficial to many insects and animals. Supplementing this edge habitat with a 5 foot buffer of mulch or gravel is another step that you can take to create an even drier patch that ticks will be less likely to cross. You can also use this approach around areas like playgrounds and patios to catch the rare ticks that might have decided to brave the lawn environment.

3) Removing favorite foods of common tick hosts immediately within and surrounding areas of your yard you frequent can also reduce your risk. See plants that deer prefer –less– [here](#). Birds can also be tick hosts, placing bird feeders and baths on the edge of the property is also recommended, (while away from tall vegetation to protect birds).

4) Remember that ticks will not drop from trees or other high objects but will rather look for hosts usually by performing an activity called ‘questing’. They’ll find some tall grass, brush, shrubs, or debris and stand with their legs raised awaiting their next unsuspecting host. Walking in the center of trails and yard areas without overhanging vegetation is another sound practice.

5) Even if you take all of the above steps, a tick check should be performed any time you spend some quality time outdoors– even in your own yard! Check out this great resource for tick identification and more actions you can take to protect you and your family from tick borne pathogens. <https://web.uri.edu/tickencounter/>

**American dog tick questing**  
Jim Occi, BugPics, Bugwood.org



## ~Events to look forward to this Fall~

VCE-Prince William:

**Saturdays in the Teaching Garden**

**Shade Gardening:** Oct 8th, 9 a.m.

**Zoom Classes**

**Tree of Heaven & Woody Invasive**

**Control:** Tues, Sept 13th, 7 p.m.

**Forgotten Foods: Foraging in Your Backyards, Fields, and Forests:** Wed, Sept 28th, 11 a.m.

**Other VCE Sponsored Events**

**Art in the Garden, Montclair:**

Sat, Sept 17, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

**Local In Person Events:**

**Lewis Ginter Fall Plant Fest:**

Sept 16-17, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

**Native Plant Sale and Family Festival:**

**Green Spring Gardens:**

Sat, Sept 17, 9 a.m.- 3 p.m.

**Farming the Fall Harvest: Ben Lomond**

Sat, Oct 22, 11 a.m.– 4 p.m.

**Local Webinars:**

**Restoring the Little Things that Run the World: Dr. Douglas Tallamy:**

Sun, Sept 25, 3 - 5 p.m.