LAWN BASICS

The basis for a beautiful lawn

Louis Hooft

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Hello,

Downloading this guide is the first step towards a healthier and more beautiful lawn!

I'd like to congratulate you on taking this first step because I'll be taking you on a journey that will allow you to enjoy a beautiful green lawn!

On this journey, try not to focus on a quick end result but, above all, try to enjoy it along the way. You will have a lot of fun and see spectacular progress in no time!

Have fun reading,

Louis, owner MOOWY & Lawn enthusiast

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1 Who am I, you may ask?

My name is **Louis Hooft,** and I was nine years old when I first sat on a ride-on mower; then less interested in the grass and more in the 5 kilometres an hour I was tearing across the lawn. But it wasn't long before I got the itch and developed a passion for grass. After spending my entire childhood on and around golf courses, I went to study in America where, among other things, I learned everything there is to know about how golf courses manage to get and keep the best quality of grass.

Now it is **my mission** to share all the knowledge I have in a simple way so **you** too can enjoy a **beautiful green lawn!**

In this guide, you will find the basic elements that are important for success. Don’t let the unknown scare you off because you learn most by doing.

Grass is a very strong plant, so just go for it!

Did you make a mistake? Don't worry, grass always grows back!

2 Know what kind of soil you have

To devise a good maintenance strategy, it is essential to understand your soil's **pH** and **nutrient** levels. In other words, **step one** is to analyse your **soil.**

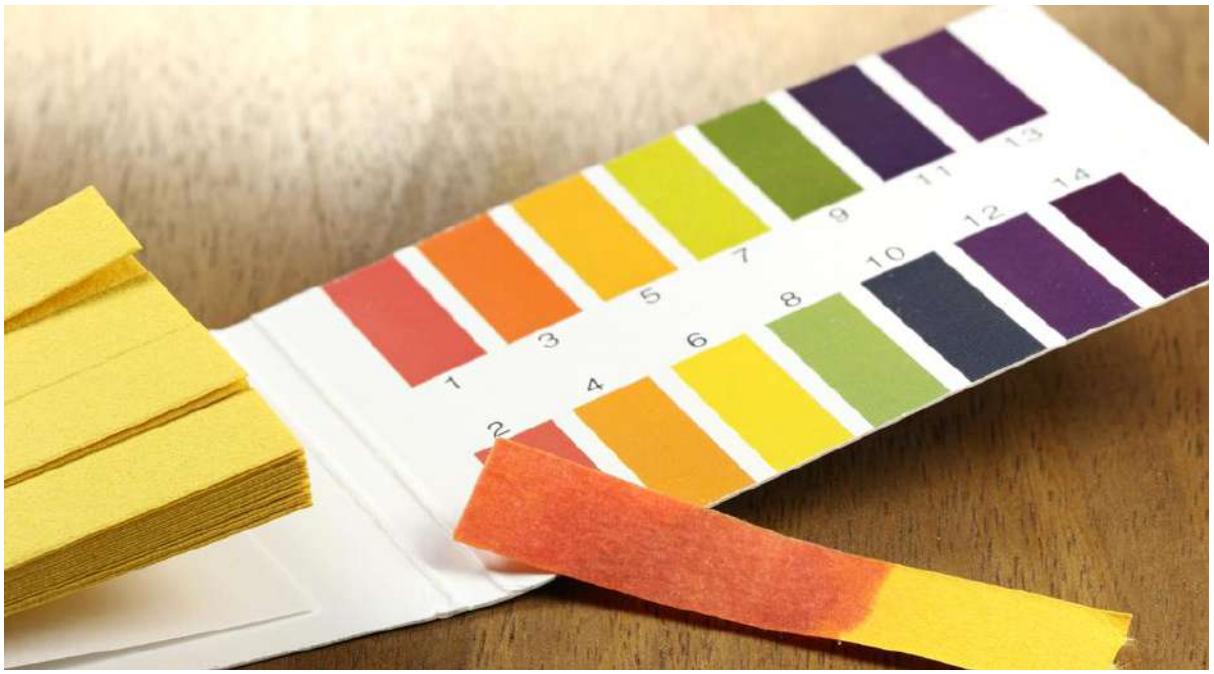
Grass grows on many different substrates, but its nutritional needs can vary significantly from soil to soil, which is why the pH is extremely important.

2.1 What is soil pH, and how does it help your lawn?

pH is a scale from 0 to 14, representing the acidity of a compound. Zero is the most acidic, and 14 is the most alkaline or base. pH7 is neutral - tap water usually has a pH of 7.

"With the right pH, grass can absorb nutrients better."

The ideal pH of a lawn is **neutral** to **slightly acidic** - between 5.5 and 7 is perfect. Most of the necessary nutrients are available for plant uptake at the correct pH, making it much easier to maintain a healthy lawn.



Most of the time, your soil will be on the acid side because the **decomposition** of organic material acidifies it. When your soil becomes too acidic, we use Calcium (also known as Lime) to **neutralise** the pH.

If the soil is too alkaline, and we want to make it more acidic by lowering the pH, we use sulphates:

- Aluminium sulphate
- Sulphate-coated lawn feed
- Ferrous sulphate

"Adjusting the pH does not happen overnight."

Adjusting the pH does not happen overnight. Depending on your situation, it can be a process of several years. Nonetheless, the correct pH is crucial for the proper absorption of nutrients and the health of your lawn!

3 Mowing

3.1 Only mow with sharp blades

It is extremely important to **always** mow with **sharp blades**. A blunt blade does not cut the grass; it tears it - this affects the appearance of the grass blade, making it a little ugly.

If the grass is torn, it will develop a brown tip, which will give your lawn an unpleasant, unattractive brown glow. Apart from the fact that it is not pretty, the blade does not heal well, so it loses a lot of moisture and lowers resistance.

Sharp blades deliver a clean cut and help the lawn stay healthy. It is easy to have the blades sharpened at a local gardening equipment shop after every 20 hours of use or before the growing seasons of spring & autumn.

3.2 Mow at the right height and mow often!

It's tempting to cut your grass nice and short to reduce the frequency of mowing. But it is **essential** to understand that grass is **severely damaged** if more than ⅓ of the leaf's length is removed in one mowing. And remember, shorter grass needs to be cut more often to **maintain** its length.

To keep your lawn free of weeds and diseases, it's **best** to mow your grass between **5 and 8 cm**. To mow grass shorter than 3 cm, you need to use a reel mower, and maintenance becomes a lot more intensive because shorter grass is less resistant to drought and disease. So longer grass stays green much longer in the summer!

TIP: Enjoy mowing! The more often you mow, the more beautiful your lawn will become. This is because more energy goes into growing horizontally, and the grass will become much fuller. Aim for **at least** once every **5 to 7 days** - it's best to mow twice a week during the growing season.

3.3 Only mow when the grass is dry

Mowing is all about the "Perfect Cut"! When your grass is wet, the blade becomes too heavy, and it is harder for the mower to make a clean cut, resulting in torn grass.

Dry grass stands much straighter, making it easier to achieve a clean cut. In addition, wet grass sticks under the mower deck, which means a lot of cleaning up. Therefore, it is best to mow at the end of the day so that the morning dew can dry.

"By following these mowing guidelines, your lawn will improve tremendously fast!"

4 Fertilising

The most important thing you need to know before fertilising is the size of your lawn. Measure your lawn accurately, and note the size in your lawn journal. It's crucial to know how big your lawn is before you start fertilising it!

4.1 The importance of fertilisers

Sun and water can only do so much for your lawn, so relying on the elements alone is not a wise idea. Fertilisers, also known as **Lawn feed** can help you.

Remember, your lawn takes its nutrients from the earth - if your soil lacks the necessary nutrients, it directly impacts the development of your grass plants. **Fertilising** should be seen as an essential support system for **vital soil**.

Through photosynthesis (caused by sunlight), grass produces sugars from the available nutrients, and these sugars are stored in the leaves of the lawn. Therefore, mowing strips away a significant part of the nutrient stock in the lawn.

Frequent mowing is very good for your lawn, as discussed in chapter 3, but it impoverishes the soil.

To counteract this, we fertilise the soil.

TIP: Fertilising your lawn is much more effective when your soil has the right pH value.

Read all about it in Chapter 2 "Know what kind of soil you have".

4.2 When should I fertilise?

There are two growth periods in the year when you definitely need to fertilise to prevent a nutrient deficiency - namely **spring** and **autumn**. In addition, you should also fertilise in the summer and late autumn to help your grass better survive the summer and winter.

Many people fertilise during just one growth period each year: the spring. It's understandable, of course - we love getting outside again after a dark winter, and we naturally want to enjoy our lawns again.

After the summer, many people's lawns appear rather battered and damaged, but they don't bother fertilising since the winter is coming anyway. This reasoning is wrong because a damaged lawn will only worsen in the winter, falling prey to moss, disease and mould.

Therefore, anyone who follows this regime is in a downward spiral with their lawn and will never have a full, green, moss- and weed-free lawn.

Compare it to a human being: we're not happy with just one meal a day either. We need to have several meals a day, which brings varied nutrients into our system.

Your lawn will never be vital and strong with just one meal a year. If you want to keep a full green lawn, you should fertilise **3 to 4 times a year.**

- In spring
- Before the summer
- In early autumn
- Late autumn

4.3 What is lawn fertiliser?

Simply put, fertiliser contains the building blocks from which grass produces sugars through photosynthesis. These sugars are used to keep the plant healthy and to make it grow.

Most fertilisers are **NPK fertilisers**. This means that the elements N, P & K are present in this fertiliser.

N= Nitrogen	This stimulates the leaf development and growth of the plant.
P = Phosphorus	Stimulates root development
K = Potassium	Increases the resistance of the plant and strengthens the cell structure

4.4 Different fertilisers for the time of year

Each season, you should fertilise with a different **NPK ratio** because the needs of your grass differ at different times of the year.

For example, the grass needs much more nitrogen in the spring than in the summer and autumn. On the other hand, you want to make the grass strong for the winter by using a fertiliser with more potassium.

Use this handy NPK chart to help you understand which fertiliser to use depending on the season:

Season	Type of fertiliser	Example NPK
Spring	Spring lawn feed	12 - 5 - 5
Summer	Slow-release lawn fertiliser	14 - 5 - 10
Early Autumn	Autumn Fertiliser	6 - 5 - 12
Autumn	Autumn Fertiliser	6 - 5 - 12

5 Watering/spraying

Although watering your lawn may seem like a simple task, it shouldn’t be underestimated. Too much water is bad for your lawn, and it can be costly. But your grass won't survive with too little water either.

Developing the right watering strategy for your lawn **can** be complicated, but the following tips will give you the basics.

5.1 How much water does grass need?

In spring, summer and autumn, grass needs **2 to 2.5 cm** of water a week to **remain healthy** and therefore green. But how do you know how much water your lawn receives?

Rainfall is relatively easy to measure, using a rain gauge or an old tuna can (which is about 2.5 cm deep). If you collect **2 to 2.5 cm** of water each week,

you are safe. If no rain is expected, water more to make sure you reach the weekly 2.5 cm.

5.2 The best irrigation strategy

With a good irrigation strategy, we can **train** the lawn to become healthier and better able to **withstand drought**. By watering deeply (rather than superficially), we stimulate the roots to burrow more deeply into the soil. Deeper roots are longer, and they absorb more nutrients and water during drought conditions.

However, if you water your lawn little and often, the roots become lazy and shallow - only 2cm deep into your soil. Shallow roots dry out quickly and cause a weak lawn.

We actually want to develop roots to a depth of around **10 to 15 cm**. You can achieve this by watering deeply twice a week. This means **+- 1 to 1.5 cm** of water per watering.

I can’t tell you how long your sprinkler should be running because this depends on the type of sprinkler and your water pressure. But I can explain how to measure how long it takes for your sprinkler to spray **1 to 1.5 cm** of water: simply use a rain gauge or empty tuna can to collect water as you sprinkle.

Don't be alarmed: this often takes more than 30 minutes!

5.3 The best time to spray

Try to water as **early** in the morning as possible.

Watering early in the morning gives your lawn a chance to dry out before it gets dark. Leaving your lawn wet overnight can lead to diseases and fungal problems. Additionally, it's generally cooler in the morning, and less windy, so less water evaporates, which in turn saves money on your water bills.

If watering in the afternoon is the only option, it's better than not watering at all! Make sure that you never water during the hottest part of the day as a lot of the water will evaporate unnecessarily.

5.4 Additional advice

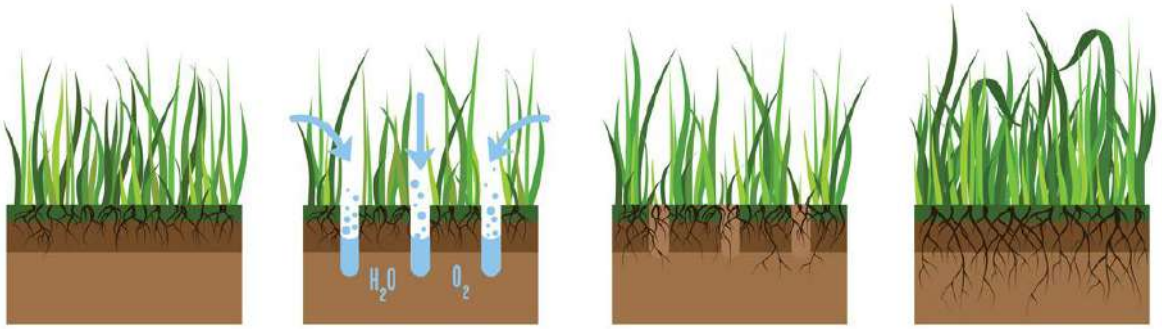
If a brown patch reacts badly or not at all to water, another problem may be the cause. Assuming you follow our spraying strategy, it could be mould, brown patch fungus, caterpillars/larvae, common grubs or heavily compacted soil.

If you are not sure, please contact us via the website www.moowy.co.uk or send me an email at hello@moowy.co.uk.

6 Aerating

6.1 Why do we aerate your lawn?

When you aerate your lawn, you prick holes in the soil and extract wads of earth of about 3 to 5 cm long. These holes help air, water, and nutrients reach the roots better, stimulating them to **grow deeper**; resulting in a stronger and more vital lawn.



Aerating can be done mechanically with a rented machine or with a manual hollow pipe aerator. You can rent an aerator in most garden machine shops.

The **main reason** for **aerating** is to prevent **compacted soil** which is too hard/compact to provide good circulation of air, water and nutrients. Additionally, a thatch layer over your lawn (a layer of dead organic material between soil and grass leaves) has a suffocating effect on the roots and blocks access to necessary basic elements.

Getting these essential basic elements to the roots of your grass quickly transforms the general health of your lawn.

Therefore, follow these tips to aerate your lawn successfully!

6.2 When and how often should I aerate?

Inspect your lawn **before aerating**.

Test if the soil is too compact: do this by poking a screwdriver **15 cm** into the ground. If this is difficult, your soil is heavily compacted.

Check the **felt layer** (the layer of organic matter between the soil surface and the grass blade): more than **1 cm** is too much felt.

If one of these inspections fail the test, it's high time to aerate.

However, it's **important** not to overdo aeration. Once or twice a year is normally sufficient for a lawn with compacted soil. More than that can cause damage to the underlying root structure.

If the surface structure of your soil is good, once every two years is sufficient as a preventative measure.

6.3 The best time for aeration

To aerate well, the soil must be moist; not too wet, but moist. This will enable the machine to extract better plugs from the soil.

Is your soil too dry? Then water your lawn the evening before you intend to aerate.

It is also best to **aerate during a growing season**, i.e. in spring or autumn when the soil is at its softest. Your grass will recover better during these periods.

After aerating, it is an excellent time to reseed.

7 Overseeding and underseeding

Professionals have **overseeded** their lawns for centuries as part of their annual maintenance schedule. Unfortunately, most private homeowners don't know anything about it.

Overseeding produces the most significant improvement to the quality of your lawn than almost any other intervention I've discussed so far.

7.1 Why overseed?

A blade of grass only lives for **45 to 60 days.** Therefore, the production of new leaves needs to exceed the shedding of the older blades to prevent the lawn from thinning out.

Your lawn's reproductive capacity rapidly decreases in mature grass plants. So, keeping the lawn continually young is the **biggest secret** in maintaining a full and healthy lawn!

The easiest way to keep your lawn young - while maintaining a high reproduction capacity - is overseeding.

7.2 When to overseed?

The cool-season grasses we find in the UK can be overseeded in spring, late summer, and early autumn. My personal preference is late summer and autumn.

Advantages of autumn:

- New grass can develop longer roots before experiencing drought.
- The soil is nice and warm after the summer, and that is exactly what the grass needs.
- It rains more often in autumn, so the grass gets enough water.
- Less trouble from weeds

Advantages of spring:

- Soil has a higher moisture content than after the summer.
- No leaves on the trees yet, so there is more light for the grass.

Whether you overseed in spring or autumn, it is still the best thing you can do to achieve a full green lawn!

7.3 How to overseed

Step 1: Calculate the amount of grass seed needed

The amount of grass seed you need depends on whether you're laying out a new lawn or reseeding an existing one. For a new lawn, we recommend 34g per square metre. For overseeding, half of that amount is sufficient: 17g per square metre.

If you're not sure how big your lawn, you can easily approximate it. A large step is about 1 metre, so pace your lawn to estimate its length and width.

Step 2: Work in small sections

If you have a large or asymmetrical lawn, divide the larger areas into smaller parts and calculate how much grass seed you need for each part.

Step 3: Choose your moment

If you're overseeding, you should sow new grass seeds immediately after mowing. Make sure that the grass is dry (but the soil is moist).

Step 4: Distribute the seed evenly

Spread the grass seed evenly over the earth. A spreader is a useful tool for this, but you can also do it by hand. Spread the first part lengthways and the second part widthways for even coverage.

Step 5: Lightly rake the grass seed

Raking ensures optimum contact with the soil. Without soil contact, the seed will not germinate.

Step 6: Roll with a weighted lawn roller

After you've raked the seed into the soil, rolling with a weighted roller helps maximise the soil contact. The grass seed gets pushed into the ground a little so that it remains firmly in place and is less likely to get wash away from watering or rain.

Step 7: Water, water, water

Water the soil well and keep it moist until the seed plants emerge. *NOTE:* It's better to lightly water four times a day than to heavily water once a day; otherwise, there's a chance that the grass seed will wash away.

7.4 Re-seed bald spots in good time!

A lawn naturally looks at its best without bald- or brown spots. However, these can occur for various reasons, such as pets, mould, disease, drought, and treading.

Most grasses can close a palm-sized spot naturally. However, this takes a long time, and before you know it, weeds take over.

TIP: *Be quick and sow bald spots with the grass seed you have left over from overseeding!*

8 Conclusion

With the maintenance basics in this guide, I am confident that you can get the beautiful lawn you're looking for. After a while, maintaining a lawn will no longer feel like a chore but like a hobby - or maybe, as in my case, a passion!

A well-maintained lawn is not only pleasing to the eye, it is also your showpiece. And, believe me, you will receive plenty of compliments and questions about it!

If you want to know more now or get started right away, be sure to visit www.moowy.co.uk.

If you have any questions, feel free to ask them at hello@moowy.co.uk

I wish you lots of success and fun with your lawn!

Louis from MOOWY