



## Get ready ... Early spring landscaping tips

**D**uring the cold months of winter, many people stare longingly out of the window dreaming of spring and time spent outdoors. For those with green thumbs, images of tending to the garden and other aspects of their landscapes no doubt dominate such daydreams. Draw inspiration from those budding crocuses and daffodils pushing through the last remnants of snow and employ these tips to prepare for the upcoming gardening season.

- One of the first steps is to apply a preemergent weed killer to get a head start knocking out weeds that can plague the lawn during the growing season. Killing weeds

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- at the roots early on can mean far fewer hassles in spring and summer, and may prevent new generations of weeds from cropping up each year.
  - While it may be tempting to take a prematurely warm day as a sign that spring is in full force and purchase a bunch of annuals, it's better to know the last of the possible frost dates (check "The Farmer's Almanac"); otherwise, you may waste time and money planting flowers or vegetables only to have them zapped by another frosty day.
  - Amend the soil so that it is the right consistency — just crumbling when lifting it. Soil that is too muddy after spring thaw can harden, making it difficult for plants to flourish later on. Speak with representatives at a local lawn and garden center about which types of amendments you can add to the soil in your particular area to enrich it.
  - Lawn and garden experts at The Home Depot suggest filling in bare patches of lawn now by mixing a few shovelfuls of soil with grass seed. Then apply this patch to the bare areas, water, and continue to care for the area until the spot fills in.
  - Spend a day in the garage or shed tending to the lawn mower and other gardening equipment. Clean all tools and ensure that everything works, repairing parts as needed.
  - Give outdoor entertaining spaces a good scrubbing, clearing away dirt and grime that may have accumulated over the winter. Use a leaf blower to blow away any left-over leaves.
  - Check if the front porch, railings or decking need painting and/or staining. Tackle these projects when the weather is cooler so everything will be ready for those peak spring days.
  - Think about any annuals you might want to plant in the landscape this year that will complement any existing shrubbery or perennials. Come up with a theme so that the entire yard is cohesive.
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### Potential culprits behind thinning grass

Thinning grass can be caused by any number of things. And while it might take a little effort to address, thinning grass can be treated if homeowners correctly identify that cause of the problem.

#### LEAF SPOT

The Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment at the University of Massachusetts Amherst notes that leaf spot diseases affect both cool- and warm-season turfgrasses. Various fungi can cause leaf spot. Symptoms and the timing of the appearance of leaf spot will vary depending on which fungi is causing the problem. For example, *bipolaris sorokiniana*, which affects grasses in warm, wet summer months, produces small spots that are dark purple to black. *Drechslera poae* is another fungi that causes leaf spot, and it also produces dark purple to black spots. However, it tends to appear in the spring when the weather is cool and moist. Understanding the different fungi and when they typically strike can help homeowners identify what is causing their grass to thin. In such situations, professional landscapers can be invaluable resources as well.

#### ASCOCHYTA LEAF BLIGHT

Lawns suffering from ascochyta leaf blight will become straw-colored. According to the lawn care and pesticide experts at Ortho, when a lawn is affected by ascochyta leaf blight, its healthy grass blades will be mixed in with diseased grass blades. Most prevalent in the spring, this disease can affect grass at any time during the growing season. That's because the ascochyta fungi invade leaf blades through wounds, such as those that can result from mowing. Ortho notes that dull lawn mowers can contribute to the disease, which might disappear on its own and can even return after it's seemingly been cured.

Working with a landscape professional is a great way to combat issues before they compromise the look of a lawn.



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