



General Lawn Care Tips

Soil

Bozeman soil tends to be high in clay. This allows for high water-holding capacity, but its density slows down the movement of water. Clayey soils have a tendency to compact, especially in areas of high traffic, which may lead to standing water and runoff. If you are concerned about the condition of your lawn/landscape, and you think the soil might be the culprit - test your soil by following the steps below.

1. Using a soil probe or garden spade, try digging to 6 inches of soil depth. If significant effort is required to dig further than 2 inches, you may want to **aerate** your topsoil. Take a look at the root depth of your turf. If it is shallow (less than 2 inches), your lawn might benefit from a **Cycle & Soak** watering schedule to drive roots down deeper into the soil.
2. Put a handful of soil in a jar and send it to MSU's Schutter Diagnostic Lab. You will receive a test result that details the soil's pH and nutrient availability. Bozeman soil is usually alkaline (pH above 6) due to salt content (so a **pH near 7 is normal**); the goal is to get close to 6 for maximum nutrient availability. If nitrogen, phosphorus and/or potassium are low, you may want to consider adding a **slow release fertilizer** - similar to 5-10-3 (N-P-K) - while amending the soil.

Turf

Turf maintenance differs based on the dominant species in your lawn.

- Kentucky bluegrass is best maintained at a height of about 2-3 inches. This helps keep the soil cool and moist, and keeps your lawn green. Mowing should be infrequent (once every other week) to slow down the growth rate of the turf - lowering water demand.
- Fescue mix is best maintained at a height of about 2 inches. This will keep the turf looking strong since it does not spread or grow aggressively.
- If the blades look dark blue, there is a chance the turf is about to go dormant due to prolonged water stress.
- If the outside of the blades look yellow, the soil may need more potassium (K).
- If the mid-rib of the blades look yellow, the soil might need more nitrogen (N).

Weeds

Most weeds in Bozeman are very competitive in gaining more area of the lawn. They have a competitive edge by using most of their resources on strengthening their roots and by going dormant up to 3 months after turf. Because of this, the tried-and-true method to rid your lawn of weeds is by digging their root system up. The easier way is to apply an **organic herbicide** to your lawn in the spring and late fall. **Note:** herbicides are for preventative use; they suppress emergence, they do NOT kill weeds.

MORE INFORMATION & DEFINITIONS ON THE NEXT PAGE



Note: amending thin topsoil (less than 3 inches deep) requires removing turf, loosening the top 6 inches of native soil, and adding fertilizer (and some form of **humus**).

If an area of turf looks yellow/brown, the blades have likely dried out and gone dormant due to water stress. This area will grow back, within about a season - if it is generously cared for. This will require watching for weed emergence, adding a small amount of slow release fertilizer, and possibly re-seeding.

Schutter Diagnostic Lab: <http://diagnostics.montana.edu/>

Definitions/Explanations:

- Aerate - using gardening tools to punch 1 inch holes into the soil. Some tools are manual, some use compressed air. This is a method for loosening topsoil.
- Cycle & Soak - breaking your watering schedule into 2-3 cycles. For example, rather than running a zone for 20 minutes, you could set two start times for 10 minute cycles, allowing the lawn to rest in between each cycle.
- Slow release fertilizer - these tend to be mild in nutrient concentration, and they have a coating which allows nutrients to release into the soil throughout the growing season.