Why do people apply sand over their lawns?

Q. I see some folks putting a layer of lawn dressing (usually sand) on their lawns in the spring. What's the purpose for this and is it a good practice?

A. Routinely applying a layer of soil or sand to a lawn can cause more damage than good. You can introduce weed seeds, nematodes and even diseases with some sources of lawn dressing. Basically, the only reasons to apply a layer of soil or sand to a lawn are to fill in low areas or bare areas, as a method of dealing with an identified thatch problem or possibly to cover surface tree roots.

Q. This will be my first spring with St. Augustinegrass. When and what should I use for the initial fertilization?

A. You don't have to get into a hurry about fertilizing your lawn. It's best to wait until the lawn has completely greened up before applying any fertilizer. As a matter of fact, most people fertilize too early. A good rule to follow is to not fertilize until you have had to mow once. This way the soil is warm enough for the fertilizer elements to be used and not leached away. Waiting allows for much more efficient use of the fertilizer. In the absence of the results of a soil test, I'd recommend 8-4-8, 8-2-10, 10-4-10, 12-2-14, 13-3-13, 16-2-16 or a similar analysis fertilizer with the nitrogen and potassium equal or close to equal and low phosphorus (center number). Below is a web publication on St. Augustinegrass. [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH010](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH010)

Q. Would you advise me in pruning an overgrown, out of control nine year old Indian Hawthorn bush?

A. Indian Hawthorn responds well to severe pruning. You could wait until the flowers begin to fade and prune the plant(s) as far back as needed. But keep in mind that genetically these plants are designed to grow to a certain size and no matter how much you prune, they will regrow to the original size again and again.

Q. How can I prune azaleas to maintain a natural shape?

A. What I usually do in pruning azaleas is wait until the blooms have faded but before July and take out the taller shoots. In doing this, I'll follow the taller shoots back into the plant and I try to cut them where they originate – in other words I prune them where they come out of another branch or the main trunk with a hand pruner. By doing this I reduce the overall height without having to shear the plants. The end result is a more natural looking plant instead of one that looks like a ball or box from being sheared. I try to avoid shearing azaleas.

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