



Brainerd Dispatch/Jennifer Stockinger

Crow Wing County master gardener Jennifer Knutson recently pruned a rudbeckia plant in her yard on Middle Cullen Lake in rural Pequot Lakes.

Planting the seeds



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Crow Wing County master gardener Jennifer Knutson said spring is the best time to overseed the damaged areas of your lawn.

BY JENNIFER STOCKINGER | STAFF WRITER

PEQUOT LAKES — April showers are suppose to bring May flowers, but the way this spring is going in the Brainerd lakes area ...

The unpredictable, below-normal temperatures have delayed yard work and work on preparing your gardens for the summer.

Crow Wing County master gardener Jennifer Knutson of rural Pequot Lakes offered several tips on what to do to prepare a healthy lawn in the spring.

Knutson said you shouldn't walk on your grass if it is wet or soggy because this will compact the soil and make it easier for weeds to take over. Once the grass dries and the soil becomes firm, Knutson said you should lightly rake the leaves and dead grass and put them in a compost. Knutson said areas of lawn affected by snow mold also should be gently raked.

"Snow mold is rarely serious, but if it's not taken out it'll take the grass longer to green up," Knutson said. "Salt and sand from the snow plows also should be raked out so grass is not smothered by the sand."

Spring is a good time to overseed the damaged part of the lawn. Knutson said the area should be raked and the soil should be loosened before seeding. The seed should be slightly pressed on the grass and watered.

"You don't want to overwater it, but keep it

damp for a few weeks," Knutson said. "You should start seeing grass in two to four weeks."

Fertilizing the lawn in spring is not necessary, but Knutson said that if you do fertilize, don't use fertilizers made with phosphorus because it's illegal in Minnesota and is bad for the lakes.

"The best time to fertilize in the spring is after the first mowing," Knutson said. "If people fertilize in the fall they don't need to do it again in the spring."

On Knutson's lawn, she uses a mild, organic fertilizer called Milorganite and lake water. She also uses a repellent for rabbits and deer to protect her garden and certain grasses.

One important thing to do in late April or early May is to use a pre-emergence crabgrass killer or corn gluten meal that prevents weed seed germination, Knutson said. These applications need to be watered to activate, so the best time to lay it is before a rainfall.

"The best way to get rid of dandelions is to spot-treat them or individually dig them out. Sometimes people use too many herbicides on their lawn."

Dethatching or aerating a lawn can be done as soon as the lawn begins to green up. Knutson said dethatching is necessary when the brown fibrous mat located between the soil surface and where the grass shoots begin to turn green reaches a thickness of greater than three-fourths of an inch. Knutson said the best way to dethatch a lawn is to rent a dethatcher, which is similar to a power rake.

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Knutson said to wait to prune any winter-burned sections of arborvitae until new growth begins to expand. She added that any shrubs that bloom in the spring should not be pruned until after they bloom.

Those planning to plant a new garden this season should have a soil test done to see if they need to amend the soil. Soil test bags are available at the University of Minnesota Extension Office in Brainerd; testing costs \$15.

Knutson said to be careful not to take mulch off perennials too soon because temps still could dip below freezing.

In the first or second week in May, plant peas, leaf lettuce, spinach and radish seeds. Onions, cabbage, cauli-

flower and broccoli also can be transplanted during this time. Wait until late May, when the air and soil temperatures are warmer, to plant tomatoes, peppers and eggplants.

Knutson said spring is a good time to divide overcrowded perennials — when new shoots have poked through the soil, it's time to dig the plant up to divide. Knutson said that if there is an early spring blooming plant, it shouldn't be divided until late summer or early fall.

"If you noticed during the growing season that some of your perennials were dying out at the center, flowering less or tending to flop over, this could be a sign that they are overcrowded and need to be divided," Knutson said.

Ornamental grasses and perennial stocks that were left standing during the winter also should be cut down, Knutson said.

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