

Handy Hints for DIY Landscapers

Adequate maintenance is essential to ensure long term healthy and robust lawns. Perhaps the most important aspect to any lawn maintenance program is the periodic application of topdressing.

Modern topdressings such as **Nitrotop®** are quite different to the blends of sand and soil historically used as topdressing materials, and whilst these still have a roll to play, the nature of our current climate means that topdressing now carries the important function of ensuring efficient water use in an era of limited supplies.

Nitrotop® is an organic topdressing, containing 70% fine organic compost and it is this component that provides not only the structure of the product, but the water holding necessary. Importantly, the fine compost component provides slow release organic nutrients that provide gradual nutrition to the turf roots. The remaining 30% of sand provides the fine mineral particles filling hollows in the lawn.

In response to reduced water availability **Nitrotop®** includes Droughtmaster™ wetting agent. Wetting agents are an important additive in such situations as they optimise water use efficiency. Wetting agents are surfactants. Common dish washing detergents for example contain both the 'soap' component that does the actual cleaning, but importantly the 'surfactant' which stops grease and oils etc from repelling the water. In the case of **Nitrotop®**, the wetting agent helps overcome dryness in soil and allows it to wet out properly and not just let the water wash straight through and be lost, and consequently you don't waste water.

It is important that **Nitrotop®** is applied to a maximum depth of 10mm. Too great a depth of topdressing can effectively smother the lawn and cause die-back. It is also important that lawns are well watered following the application of topdressing as the product is nutrient rich and may lead to shoot burning if not watered in.

Applying Nitrotop®

There are a number of aspects that need to be considered with regard to topdressing your lawn.

Aerating your Lawn

It's important to aerate the lawn, particularly if you have heavy clay soil. Aeration is the naturally occurring process of air exchange between the soil and its surrounding atmosphere. Practically speaking, aeration is the process of mechanically removing small plugs of thatch and soil from the lawn to improve soil aeration. The aeration process is also known as coring in the lawn mowing industry and homeowners often refer to it as lawn aeration. Simply drive a fork halfway into the lawn and wiggle it. This opens up the soil and allows plenty of oxygen in, which is really good for the roots. As a rule it's best to aerate lawns twice a year, once in winter and once in summer to keep the lawn healthy and in good condition.

Why aerate your lawn?

Many lawns have compacted soil, particularly where foot traffic is heavy. This often restricts the movement of water and air to the root zone. Lawn-mowing, walking and playing on lawns all contribute to soil compaction and this in turn stresses lawns, which to survive adequately, requires aerating.

Aerating breaks down the compacted soil allowing for water and air to flow more adequately to the root system improving water penetration and in turn the appearance of your lawn. Aeration helps to;

1. Enhance water, fertilizer and oxygen uptake and use
2. Enhance heat / drought stress tolerance
3. Improve deeper root development
4. Reduces water runoff and pooling

NB: It should be noted that extensive aeration will to some degree place stress on the lawn as a consequence of root damage and may not always be required. An assessment of the degree of compaction should be made before aeration is carried out.

Top Dressing using Nitrotop®

In general, established lawns should be topdressed every 2-3 years. Although topdressing can be undertaken year round, as the start of the growing season, spring is the prime time for topdressing.

Why top dress your lawn?

1. Levels off your lawn enabling a closer cut without scalping the lawn.
2. Assists in the control of thatch
3. Strengthens lawn density
4. Improves nutrient absorption
5. Allows for even growth
6. Improves lawn drainage

Prior to top dressing your lawn it should be mowed relatively low without scalping. This allows for greater access to hollows that require filling. As a nutrient rich topdressing we recommend that no fertiliser is applied at the time of topdressing. A light fertiliser application could be considered approximately 2 months after topdressing. This will avoid excessive growth of 'soft' shoots that are exposed to hot weather.

Nitrotop® is sold by the cubic metre and when applied at a depth of 10mm, 1 cubic metre covers 100 square metres of lawn.

For additional information we would encourage you to contact any of our qualified horticulturists.