

Why do lawn care companies maintain lawns differently than do-it-yourselfers?**Feb 27, 2015**

Many professional lawn care companies are very close or already starting their regular applications, and thus we are starting to receive calls and emails questioning if the lawn care companies are doing what's agronomically sound. Here are a few points highlighting the difference between professionals and do-it-yourselfers (DIY's):

- Lawn care professionals have access to many different products than most DIY's. Though active ingredients may be similar in both professional and DIY products, professionals have access to combination fertilizer/pesticide products with different loadings of active ingredients, different types and rates of slow release fertilizers, and different formulations (liquid vs granular products) that add more flexibility to application timing than what most DIY products can deliver.
- Lawn care professionals also have access to much more accurate sprayers and spreaders than DIYs, further maximizing their ability and flexibility to apply at low rates and at slightly different timings than DIY's.
- Depending on the size of the business, each truck or applicator may have up to 500 lawns that need applications within a given window or in the early spring, before the crabgrass germinates. Thus, your particular lawn care company may need to start a little earlier than UNL recommends. In most cases, this should make little difference agronomic difference as long as the application is done prior to the "drop-dead" date. For instance, our research and research at many other universities clearly show that preemergence herbicides for crabgrass can be applied very early in the spring and still provide season-long crabgrass control, especially when the high recommended rate and/or split applications are used.
- Lawn care companies are demanded by their customers to deliver green, attractive lawns, usually requesting the nicest lawn on the block. Most University extension publications give fertilizer and pest recommendations that will create an acceptable looking lawn with minimal inputs. To achieve the lawns that most customers are willing to pay for usually requires a higher level of fertilization, weed control, and often white grub control in much of Nebraska. Many lawn care companies will let you select a predetermined level for your lawn, potentially reducing fertilizer and/or pesticide use depending upon your specific lawn needs and personal desires. Regardless of the level that you select, regular mowing at the >3.0 inches and judicious irrigation are the largest determinants of the attractiveness of your lawn (assuming you have the right grass types in your lawn).
- Lawn care companies can make mistakes on occasion; treating the wrong location, drifting product onto the sidewalk without sweeping it off, or damaging an ornamental or vegetable plant. Quality companies will listen to your concerns and take responsibility when it is their fault and correct their mistakes.
- Quality lawn care companies will furnish references to check prior to contracting their services.
- There is more to lawn care besides mowing and spreading fertilizer. It takes a lot of education, training, and licensing to be able to correctly identify weeds, diseases, and insects in your lawn and landscape. Seek out and hire companies that utilize highly educated and trained individuals to care for your landscape.
- Excellent lawn care companies rely on respectable and competent applicators, who must be licensed by the state to apply to other's lawn for hire. There are companies that do not have licensed applicators and are, therefore, operating illegally. Be sure to ask to see their applicators license and proof of insurance, or you can check for their license on your own at <http://www.kellysolutions.com/ne/Applicators/index.htm> in Nebraska.

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