

June is a great time to fertilize your lawn

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This is a great time to fertilize turfgrass with nitrogen. Soil microbial activity starts to rapidly increase as the soil temperatures rise in late spring/early summer. This is bad news for turfgrass plants because microbes have much greater surface area than turfgrass roots. Microbes literally get “first dibs” on soil nutrients. Sometimes the microbes release more nitrogen than they need which can result in very green and rapidly growing grass. These periods of high nitrogen mineralization generally occur in mid-summer when the soils are wet and warm and in spring following the winter freeze-thaw cycles. The latter period is the reason the grass grows so vigorously once it greens up each spring. It’s also the reason we don’t recommend fertilizing during early spring and mid-summer.

In late-May, increasing microbial activity and nitrogen immobilization can result in yellow or chlorotic turf. Our research data generally shows the June decline in quality. In the fertilizer programs study shown below, the visual quality rating of the non-fertilized control quickly dropped in June of 2015 (Fig. 1). Plots fertilized with urea nitrogen in June had improved visual quality rating. In 2016, the non-fertilized control nearly died from gray leaf spot disease while the fertilized plots had zero disease. None of the turf was treated with a fungicide. The well-timed fertilizer application improved plant health and prevented outbreak of the disease.

In the research, a 100% quick-release fertilizer was used. In practice, a 50% quick- 50% slow-release fertilizer is recommend to provide uniform color and growth. For lawns, look to apply between 0.75 and 1.00 lbs of nitrogen per 1000 square feet from a balanced fertilizer material for great results. More info can be found in the Turf iNfo from mid-May http://turf.unl.edu/turfinfo/5_18_SpringFert.pdf.

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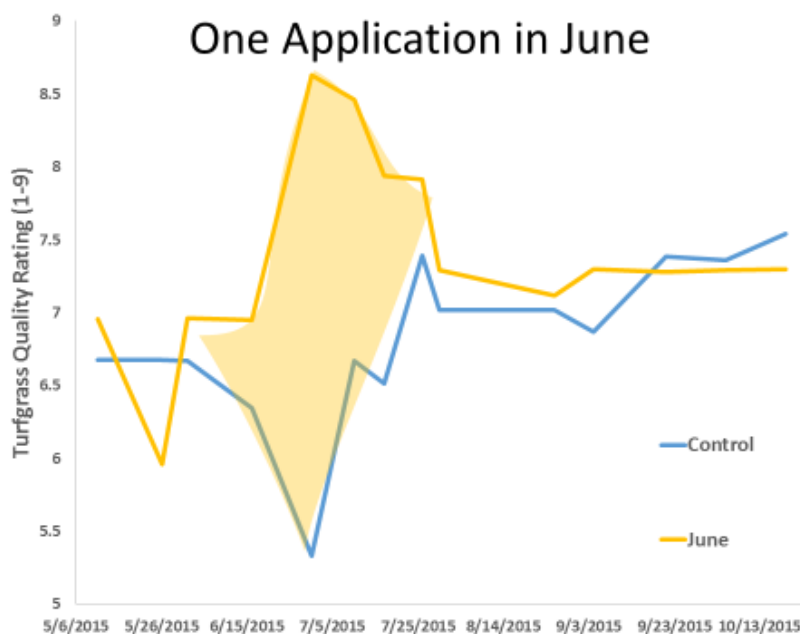


Figure 1. The result of fertilizer application timing on turfgrass visual quality rating. The blue line was never fertilized while the orange line was fertilized once with 0.75 lbs of nitrogen per 1000 square feet in early June. Quality rating is judged on a 1 to 9 scale where 1 is dead, 6 is minimally acceptable, and 9 is perfect quality.