Is Aeration a Real Money-Maker?



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The fall means cleanups for most landscape contractors, but it is also an ideal time to aerate. Aeration is perfect for compacted soils as it allows air to circulate through them, helps improve drainage and brings new life to a deteriorating turfgrass.

But, just how profitable can it be? Is it worth the investment in time and equipment to offer to your clients?

Q. JonLawn: It is widely discussed that aeration can be a windfall for the bottom line, but I think it's the opposite. Sure, I can charge three times the mowing price for aeration and then fertilize and seed on top of that. However, a walk-behind aerating unit is much narrower and slower than a mower, and if I do two passes that are slow and narrow, I'll end up making less per hour than a simple mow. Then, if I have already cut the grass short and overseeded, I'm not mowing for a couple of weeks and lose money there. So unless I have a z-aerator (which I don't) where is the extra profit? Seems like it would be more profitable to not even suggest this package of services to customers, which would be a moral dilemma because most lawns need it.

A. grandview (2006): Add-ons mean extra money. If you're sitting on your butt doing nothing, you're not making money. Who said you can't overseed and cut the grass? Spring or fall aerations are good, before your cutting starts and in the fall when it slows down.

JonLawn: I guess I could aerate after mowing stops, but I plan to aerate and seed at the same time while the grass can still grow. Also, I don't think its good to mow the week after seeding and overseeding, but if I can I'm all ears.

Grandview (2006): Unless this is a new lawn, there is no reason to skip a week.

WenzelOSLLC: Depending on the unit, you don't need two passes. It's all about

how many plugs per square feet you get.

With overseeded turf, you can get right back to mowing. It’s not too detrimental to seedlings. And even if you cut it short, say 2 inches as opposed to 3, the lawn will still need to be cut so it’s even. Some spots will be taller then others, so do 2.5 inches one week and then back to 3. Professional groundskeepers actually seed before games so the seeds get worked into the soil.

Exact Rototilling: My bundled lawn application accounts get the aerations bundled into the program as needed, but seed is extra. Bundled takes the debate out of the equation. I’m pretty close to being done with offering aeration as a onetime or stand-alone service. Most of the time the client has little to no clue what is best for the lawn.

RigglePLC: So mowing after overseeding does not hurt? Really? How do you know? Has anyone seen any data from experiments on this idea? Any evidence to back up the idea?

Actually, I agree, however, is anybody willing to try it and see? Aerate, overseed, mow half, postpone mowing on the other half?

Such a test sounds like it would be way too difficult for myself, almost an impossible experiment. How would you compare the two treatments? How would you count the number of new seedlings that sprouted?

Kawizx62003: It has to affect it, but to what degree is the question. Most likely it’s not noticeable to the naked eye. If you’re worried about it, add the missed mowing into the price.

Exact Rototilling: The mowing angle is less of a factor than the seed actually having an opportunity of getting established in the first place. My overseed routine is made up of multiple steps. It is not merely a pass or two of the aerator and then put seed down. The lawn looks very torn up and gritty when I’m done. Next in line is the client on board with a proper watering cycle? Topdressing with compost is ideal, but very few are willing to pay for it here, at least in my experience.

The damage to new seedlings from mowing is less of an issue in my opinion.

Skipster: First, we need to get the terminology down, so we’re all on the same page. Overseeding is what we call the process of seeding a different species into a turf stand to introduce a temporary cover, like seeding perennial ryegrass into bermudagrass to give color and usability during bermudagrass dormancy. What you guys are talking about is interseeding, where you use seed of the same species to increase turf density.

How to manage interseeding has been studied only sparingly in academia. But, to talk through the process, there are two main things we’re going to be concerned about here:

1. Are we ripping seedlings out of the ground by mowing?

2. If we don’t mow, are we creating too much shade and competition for the young seedlings to survive?

As long as we have proper seed-to-soil contact in our interseeding, just running a mower over the area will have no effect on the seeds and it won’t rip the seedlings out of the ground because they won’t be touched by the mower blade until they’re tall enough to be adequately anchored into the ground by their own roots. I think the drawbacks to not mowing are worse than anything that might happen when mowing.

Although I would be careful about equating anything about lawn care to high-end athletic fields (totally different purpose of management), another poster remarked about professional athletic field managers seeding thin spots in fields before games. That practice isn’t very widely used and may not be terribly effective, but a very common practice is filling divots (areas where cleats have torn turf out) with soil and primed seed after mowing the field immediately following the game. Those areas are then mowed two days later when the entire field is mowed.

lawn king: Aeration is important to sustain quality turf and a money-maker! You invest in a decent machine and you can turn large profits.