

# Little at Large

APART from raking off the fallen leaves, there are two other jobs you should do now to put the lawn to bed for the winter and give it a flying start next spring: scarifying and aerating.

Even if you mow the lawn regularly and remove any clippings, a layer of dead and dying grass will gradually build up. This thatch impedes drainage, encouraging moss and disease and also the grass to root near the surface, making it vulnerable to drought and waterlogging.

A good sign is when the lawn surface feels spongy and footprints are left when you walk on it.

The solution is to scarify the lawn using a spring-tine rake or machine which will dig into the turf and drag out any thatch. The lawn may look scruffy afterwards but will quickly recover and grow stronger as a result.

Do not leave this task until too late in the autumn though as the grass should still be growing vigorously to fill in any bare patches created. It is also a good idea to apply a mosskiller a couple of weeks before scarifying to allow the



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moss to die. Raking live moss will only help to spread it around the lawn, while leaving dead moss where it is will add to the thatch layer.

Aeration helps improve the underlying soil which, with regular use, becomes compacted. In extreme cases this compaction impedes drainage and reduces the amount of air getting to the grass roots. The result is a weak grass and a muddy or waterlogged surface.

The simplest method to aerate a lawn is to push an ordinary garden fork as deep as you can and rock it back and forth to leave holes. Lightly prickling the surface helps to aerate the grass roots but to improve drainage the holes need to reach 7.5 to 10cm deep. Aim for a hole roughly every 10cm and work systematically across the lawn.

Doing it this way is time consuming and hard work, so if necessary concentrate on the areas that suffer the most wear or hire a machine.

Happy gardening,  
**Martin Little**