



## Beautiful and healthy lawns take year-round effort

By Dawn Watson

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Dave Greene checks up on a client's lawn in Southampton Villlage. DAWN WATSON

April may be designated as National Lawn Care Month, but experts who focus on creating and maintaining beautiful and healthy lawns believe that every month is equally important for the goal at hand.

For local professionals such as Dave Greene and Pam Healey, lawn care is a year-round process. Put simply, different times call for specific types of care for the best, most vigorous lawns.

According to Mr. Greene, the owner of Southampton-based Dave Green Estate Care, which has recently been acquired by Southampton-based Ray Smith & Associates, achieving a vibrant lawn takes knowledge, patience and upkeep throughout the year. Ms. Healey, the manager of Lynch's Garden Center in Southampton, agrees that lawn maintenance is a four-season job.

But springtime is the time of year when the outdoors come into focus for many East Enders—whether because the weather is more temperate, or in anticipation of the coming months of the Hamptons high season—and lawns become a major priority. Having a lush lawn instantly elevates the perceived value of a property, but there are also more practical reasons for cultivating a thriving carpet of green.

"Of course there are so many benefits of a healthy lawn," Ms. Healey said in an interview at Lynch's last week. "There's a feeling of well-being, it looks better than the neighbors', personal satisfaction, and it's important for the environment," she said.

While looking over a client's yard in Southampton Village, Mr. Greene echoed Ms. Healey's thoughts about the environmental significance of having a healthy lawn: "Lawn is one of nature's biggest and best sponges; it absorbs nutrients and water and a healthy lawn is extremely beneficial to the environment."

According to information provided by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), an international association for the lawn care industry, healthy lawns produce oxygen, cool the atmosphere, filter out environmental contaminants, protect against erosion, and significantly increase property values.

PLANET estimates that lawns remove 5 percent of the carbon dioxide in the air and that a 50-foot by 50-foot plot of lawn will produce enough oxygen for a family of four. According to data supplied by PLANET, eight healthy lawns provide the same approximate "cooling effect" as 16 homes running their air conditioning.

Additionally, PLANET literature states that healthy lawns trap more than 12 million tons of dust and dirt annually. A dense, robust lawn also slows water runoff— removing contaminants and trapping soil—and returns fresh, filtered water to the underground supply.

"Lawns are not only beautiful, they're environmentally effective," PLANET President John Gibson wrote in a press release about the importance of National Lawn Care Month.

"Homeowners need to be proactive in April and put together a lawn care program to ensure that their lawns will be healthy and beautiful throughout the year."

Mr. Greene said he understands the needs of his East End clients, as well as the needs of a healthy lawn. "Everyone wants green and lush in the heat of the summer, which we kind of force to stay alive and green," he said. "Our job is trying to find that balance."

Before undertaking any kind of treatment or maintenance regimen, Mr. Greene said it's important to know about the makeup of the soil and grass. "We're very big on soil testing and customized programs," he said. "Otherwise treating a lawn without that knowledge is sort of like driving a car blindfolded."

Patience is critical when trying to find the right balance for a healthy and vibrant lawn, Mr. Greene said. "You're always tweaking the system, you can't do it all at once," he said. "It's like turning a big battleship around: it's a process."

According to Ms. Healey, there are two types of soil on the East End, clay and sand, and different treatments are needed for each type of soil. "Clay you need to aerate and sandy you water more often," she said.

The most popular East End grass types are Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass and fine fescues, Mr. Greene said, adding that he usually sees a blend of the three.

As for upkeep, Mr. Greene said that he prefers to customize programs to the needs of each specific lawn, but he follows a general schedule of fertilization in September and May, aeration in fall and spring, weed and crabgrass control in April, and broad leaf, dandelion and clover control in October. Summertime, he said, is for monitoring such things as water, disease, fungus, insects, weed control and grass length.

For the non-professionals tending to lawns, a good rule of thumb for when to start applying herbicides is around April 15, or when the forsythia is in full bloom, Ms. Healey said. She agreed that the best time to seed or fertilize is when the air is cool and the earth is relatively warm in the fall and spring months. She added that new Suffolk County legislation

makes it illegal to fertilize between the months of November and April to avoid runoff due to decreased absorption from the cold ground.

Keeping the grass at the healthiest length and controlling the water supply are also key, Mr. Greene reported. He said that though most generally agree that cutting the grass once a week is the routine, the best thing for the grass is never to cut more than 1/3 of the blade during lawn care. Proper watering is also important, which many non-professionals fail to understand.

"Overwatering is one of the biggest things we see ... More plants are killed by overwatering than probably anything else," he said, adding that excess moisture creates a breeding ground for blight. "Water every day is like putting gas on a fire, it provides more fuel for fungus."

Lawns should be watered deeply and infrequently, according to both Mr. Greene and Ms. Healey.

Keeping a healthy balance throughout the year is important for everybody, whether they are year-round residents or seasonal visitors, Mr. Greene said. "If you want a good lawn in the summer, you better do the right thing in the spring and fall as well."