A Personal Word from David

A NEW YEAR, A NEW DECADE, RENEWED HOPE

It is the last few days of 2009, as I prepare this newsletter for print and distribution. Already I’ve had two phone calls today that remind me how tough 2009 has been on all of us economically. Some of our customers have lost their jobs and others have had their hours or pay cut in order to keep their job. Our savings and retirement portfolios declined in size. We have had to tighten our belts financially and make some tough financial decisions. If you are like me, you are hoping and praying that 2010 brings a reversal of all the bad fortune we faced last year.

As I reflect on last year and plan for a fantastic year in 2010, we are grateful at Spriggs Brothers for all of our loyal and faithful customers. We could not exist if it were not for your loyalty and faithfulness to use our services.

Because we are appreciative and committed to you as our customer, we are not going to increase the cost of most of our services for the 3rd year in a row. Despite the increase in wages (Yes, when the minimum wage went up 41% the past two years, we had to adjust our pay to our workers.) and increase in cost of fertilizers, equipment, etc., we want to show our appreciation and continue to earn your business by keeping a lid on the cost of our services during these tough economic times.

With the new year comes new changes. One of those changes is our “organic store.” Beginning in March, we will have an online organic store for those of you who are “do it yourselfers” in your lawn and garden. We will offer free delivery for most of Collin County, north Dallas County, and east Denton County. Be sure to check out our organic product inventory and let us know if there is something else you would like for us to carry. Also, we hope to carry a line of organic pet foods too.

We look forward to serving you in 2010 and pray that this year will be successful and prosperous for you and your family.
As a kid, growing up in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, I lived with the Sunday fall ritual of coming home from church, eating Mom’s home cooked Sunday dinner of pot roast or fried chicken, and watching the Dallas Cowboys play football on TV with my Dad. Now, Dad knew a lot about football, because he would yell at the television and tell Tom Landry what plays to call and who to play at quarterback. I don’t think Coach Landry ever heard him, because my Dad would yell the same things at the TV every week of every fall, every year. Yes, my Dad was an “All Pro Arm-Chair Quarterback” and would be enshrined in Canton today if there was such an honor. Great memories and a great Dad.

The problem with Arm-Chair Quarterbacking is that it is usually giving advice or an opinion after the fact and after a situation already exists. It’s a lot easier to give advice after the fact and give advice after mistakes have been made. Many times when I give a lawn consultation, I feel like I am “Arm-Chair Quarterbacking” in giving my advice. So before I consult with you about your lawn, I want to “get ahead of the curve” and share some common problems we have with our lawns in North Texas and reasons why we have these problems.

Most of our lawn problems revolve around three or four things: (1) shade, (2) water and drainage, (3) lawn maintenance, (4) For most lawns it is often a combination of the first three problem situations.

**Shade Problems**
Lawn shade problems are caused making grass grow in areas where they do not get the required minimum sun light. Those problem areas are often caused by: (1) Houses are built so close together that they do not get enough sun light to grow a healthy lawn. After a season or two, the sod between the houses will thin out and will be plagued by weeds and bald spots. There are several solutions to this scenario. One is to change the type of grass or amend the grass that is on your side lawn to Fescue, Zoysia or St Augustine. Every type of grass has pluses and minuses, strengths and weaknesses. Another solution is to landscape or hardscape along the side of your house. A flagstone path with ferns is beautiful and works well in a lot of side yards.

(2) Privacy fences are good for privacy, but they often block sunlight along a fence line or in a corner of the yard. Again, the lawn grows thin along the fence line or in that corner of the lawn and weeds pop up where the grass is not lush and thick. Lawns that have chain link or ornamental fences do not have the shade problems that are caused by cedar privacy fences. Again, your solutions are to landscape or hardscape in that corner of the yard or along the fence line or to plant another type of grass. In our backyard, we sow fescue grass that grows along the shady areas of our fence line.

(3) Trees mature and now cast too much shade for the grass to grow lush and thick under and around the tree. As your tree matures, lift the canopy high enough for sun to shine under the branches. Also, thin the canopy of the tree so sun light can shine through the leaves of the canopy. If that doesn’t work, then you need to either change the type of grass under the tree to a more shade tol-
erant variety, or plant shade loving groundcover, or mulch and landscape under the canopy of the tree.

**Water & Drainage Problems**

Many of our turf problems are caused by drainage or standing water in areas of our lawn. Our typical southern turf grasses, Bermuda and St Augustine, not only have minimum sun requirements in order to be healthy, lush in color and thick in density, but the soil must dry out between watering. When we have as much rain as we did last September and October, combined with the cooler temperatures (below 55 degrees at night) our lawns lost color, turf density, and general health. Most St Augustine lawns were hit with some severity of fungal disease, such as brown patch. You will probably see more weeds this winter and spring because the over-abundance of rain washed away the weed pre-emergent and did damage to the natural resistance and defense properties of your turf. Here are some things you can do to help with the water and drainage issues on your lawn.

First, analyze the amount of water between your house and the neighbors and along fence lines shared with neighbors. Often we see bottoms of cedar fences that are rotting because between your watering and your neighbor’s watering, there is a mini river that flows between the houses. I know that at my house, we do not turn the irrigation system on (or run the south side zone as long) because my neighbor’s irrigation system waters my side of the yard too. It’s free water and my neighbor over waters. He can’t figure why his lawn is doing so poorly and mine is doing so well. It’s a fact, mark this down, if you see green moss growing on the ground along the side of the house or along the fence line, then the soil is too moist to have thick, healthy grass. Other options include installing a french drain along the property or fence line or use river rock to create a dry creek bed landscape.

The main cause of drainage problems in our area is because our soil is almost 100% silt fines. Clay soil is made up of silt fines. Silt fines are elongated, flat, and virtually two-sided. The silt fines will seal up and not allow the water to easily penetrate the soil and water your grass. That is why you can water your lawn for 3 - 5 minutes and the water is already running out onto the curb. The solution is to add nutritious sandy soil amendments to your clay soil, being sure to fill in low spots where water stands after a good rain or after you run sprinkler system. Sand fines are many sided and do not cohesively seal together like clay fines. Sand fines allow the rain or irrigation water to soak deep into your lawn’s root system. One of the best things you can do for your lawn is to topdress your lawn, by aerating, and spreading an organically enriched mixture of lava sand, green sand, compost, horticultural molasses, humate, and horticultural cornmeal.

There is one more situation that causes drainage and erosion problems on your lawn. I highly recommend that you have a good gutter system on the roof of your home. We see a lot of erosion damage that is caused because of a lack of gutters or misuse of gutters. The main misuse of gutters is that the force of the water coming out of the downspout causes unnecessary erosion to take place. This can (continued on next page)
be easily avoided or remedied by either (1) installing a rain barrel to catch your rain water. You can use the rain water to water your trees and shrubs. Or, (2) add a french drain extension to the gutter downspout so that the water drains underground, away from the house.

Lawn Maintenance Issues
There are two points I want to make as it relates to your lawn maintenance. One, make sure your lawn company mows at a moderate to high height. I recommend a minimum mowing height of 2 3/4 to 3 inches. Some people like the first mow of the season to be a little shorter, at 2 1/4 inches, to cut off the brown dormant ends. That’s okay, just don’t scalp your lawn.

The main problem I have seen with lawn maintenance companies in the last few years is how they use the “weed whacker” or line trimmer around the fence, house, landscape borders, etc. They usually take the “weed whacker” to the dirt around the perimeter of the lawn. The perimeter of your lawn is where we already discussed the possibility of your lawn being weak due to shade or drainage issues. When the lawn maintenance guy takes the grass to the dirt, what happens? Your grass is slow to grow back or it is killed off. Then a 2 inch trimming gash starts to spread to where I see a lot of lawns where the grass does not grow 8 to 14 inches from the fence or landscape border.

Weeds start to infest your lawn where there is no grass or where the turf is weak areas and then the weeds spread to the rest of your lawn. A lot of our weed problems would be solved if we would address the weak areas of our lawn so that the turf would be thick and healthy enough to naturally fight off pests. Please tell your lawn maintenance company to trim around the perimeter at the same height as they mow. You may need to place some seed or sod around the perimeter areas this spring in order to get your lawn to return to its original intent.

Recommended Turf Grass
The last “Arm-Chair Play” that I would like to shout out is that if you are thinking about replacing your lawn or re-sodding, please consider the following replacement sod. For a Bermuda lawn, consider Celebration Bermuda. For St Augustine sod, consider Palmetto. Zoysia grasses I recommend are Palisades and Emerald. These types of grass are more drought tolerant, disease and pest resistant than their more familiar cousins. They cost a little bit more than the familiar 419 Tiff Bermuda or Raleigh St Augustine sod, but worth the few extra dollars.