

ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs



Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest.

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or Linda Lillie, Sprigs & Twigs Inc, PO Box 245, Gales Ferry, CT 06335

Question of the Week: *To save money, my husband is thinking about buying mason's lime at the home improvement store to use on our lawn. Is that OK?*

Oh No! You should never use mason's lime on your lawn. Mason's lime is calcium oxide which is highly caustic and can burn your lawn.

There are two types of lime that can be used on your lawn: "Calcitic lime" and "Dolomitic lime". Although both are generally available at garden centers, they are very different products and you need to know which one you need and how much to apply. Do not just buy any "Lime". Over-enthusiastic liming with too much lime of the wrong type can be more damaging than doing nothing. Many times, no lime is needed at all.

Turf grass grows best with a pH of 6.0 – 6.8. The function of lime is to raise the pH of acidic soil so grass wants to grow. Below and above this range fewer macro and micro nutrients are available. Both microbial and earthworm activity is affected by pH. Soils that are acidic tend to be fungal dominant while soils that are between 6.0 – 6.8 are more balanced between fungi and bacteria (which is what you want). Balanced microbial activity contributes to the availability of nitrogen, sulfur and phosphorous in the soil. Earthworms, natural aerators of the soil, also like a pH near neutral so their sticky coating does not dry out.

It is absolutely critical to soil test for pH, Calcium and Magnesium and other things to determine how much and what kind of lime to use. The decision on which lime to use; calcitic or dolomitic, is determined by the Calcium to Magnesium ratio. Both calcitic lime and dolomitic lime contain calcium carbonate and magnesium carbonate, but the amount of each is different. Calcitic lime has less than 5% of magnesium carbonate, whereas dolomitic lime has up to 50% magnesium carbonate. If your soil is low in both magnesium and calcium you need to use dolomitic lime, otherwise without realizing it, you may be raising the pH of your soil while creating an imbalance in the calcium to magnesium ratio which creates other problems (i.e., compaction and more weeds).

There is still plenty of time to soil test and if lime is needed it can be applied until the ground freezes. Sprigs & Twigs can perform your soil testing and analysis and determine what and how much of the correct type of lime is needed, if any. We will also advise you if any other corrections should be made. We would be happy to apply the treatment or you can do it yourself.

Sprigs & Twigs is a fully organic company. Visit our website or call us for more information.

My thanks to Fred Newcombe of PJC Organic for his contribution to this article.

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