

SPRING GREEN

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For Immediate Release
January 2003

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HOW TO MAKE YOUR LAWN GREEN WITH ENVY

Learn from the pros on how to take care of your lawn while raising young athletes

(Peoria, IL) --- When it comes to lawn care, there's nothing worse than battling an uncontrollable outbreak of weeds. You slave away every Saturday, pulling, spraying, and mowing, but those blasted weeds still remain. Just when you think you have things under control, little Tommy and his friends turn your manicured paradise into their freshly groomed "soccer field." Then the real fun begins. So how do you take care of your lawn while raising young athletes? And how do those professional sports venues keep their turf looking sharp and groomed. Look no further than Ron Whitton – lawn care extraordinaire.

Whitton, 45, is the owner of a Spring Green franchise based in Peoria, Illinois. Specializing in lawn and tree care services, Spring Green is the industry leader with over 100 franchises throughout the country. With fertilization and weed control as two of their most popular services, Whitton admits he knows a lot about lawn maintenance. Started in 1989, he now has ten full-time employees and his location covers three counties within a 30-mile radius of Peoria, a city halfway between Chicago and St. Louis.

Not only does Whitton have years of experience treating homeowners' lawns, he now takes care of the Peoria Chiefs baseball team. One of his suppliers introduced him to the

professional team four years ago. Whitton says it's a mutually beneficial relationship because he keeps their field looking professionally groomed and they provide him with season tickets, advertising and promotions. Whitton says it's been a great marketing tool and sales booster.

"When I say we take care of O'Brien Field, everybody in this area knows what that is," he says. "So it gives you the perception that if you're able to take care of their field, then obviously you should be able to take care of the homeowner's lawn."

And after 14 years of experience, Whitton has seen a lot of homeowners' lawns – many with young athletes. So what do you do when you have ten 12-year-olds kicking the soccer ball back and forth? Whitton recommends homeowners plant some kind of fescue grass versus the traditional blue grass/rye grass. He says the fescue grass is much hardier and sturdier and will hold up a lot more in the heat and dryer climates. He also says if the lawn gets a little thin after a long summer's wear and tear by junior, you should aerate and overseed in the fall. But Whitton's best advice to homeowners with kids: they need to be extra diligent about tending to their lawns. And they need to remember three important tips: fertilize, water and mow.

"The first thing you need to do is fertilize it properly," he says. "Which means you want to use some kind of granular, slow-release fertilizer – not a liquid and not an all-mineral fertilizer. And the reason for that is it's going to give you a consistent seeding of the lawn and a consistent growth throughout the summer. Number two; homeowners are going to want to water their grass, but not every day. I mean when you water, you should put an inch of water down at a time, and only once a week. And the third thing is they want to mow it properly. So many people just hack it off because they don't want to mow it more than once a week or more than once a month. But every time you do that, you just stress the grass. And it will not take much abuse."

And although sports venues use some of the best fertilizers and treatments, Whitton says the Peoria Chiefs still follow a strict regiment when it comes to caring for their professional field. O'Brien Field only gets one or two weeds a year because their grass is so thick. Thick grass

leaves little room for weeds to grow in. To achieve thick grass like the pros, Whitton recommends aerating, which is done by poking several holes throughout the lawn. The holes cut through the roots and stimulates them to grow more grass blades, hence a thicker lawn.

Whether you're a homeowner raising young athletes or a professional baseball team, Whitton says quality lawn care all boils down to consistency.

"There isn't a miracle product that gets put down and there's not a miracle program," he says. "It all comes down to doing the right cultural habits and doing them day in, day out."