

spreader attached to your riding lawn mower or garden tractor. An attachment, such as a pull-type spin spreader from John Deere, can quickly distribute fertilizer evenly across your yard.

### Aerating

Aerating, the process of removing plugs of soil and thatch from the lawn, is ideal in cooler months. It encourages deep rooting, improves water and nutrient penetration, and promotes the growth of beneficial soil microorganisms. There are a variety of techniques you can use to penetrate the soil such as spiked shoes or spray-on liquids, but to most effectively aerate soil, attach a dethatcher, or a plug aerator behind a riding mower or tractor to remove plugs of soil from two to three inches deep.

### Mulching

If you prefer not to rake or bag grass or leaves, mulching with a mower is an ideal alternative. Be sure to mulch leaves only when they are dry to avoid damp and wet leaves clumping or building up under mower decks.

Remember that grass needs sunlight in the fall to help store food for winter, so don't wait until your lawn is completely matted down with leaves to mulch. A thin layer of mulched leaves is ideal and helps add nutrients to the soil, reducing the need for fertilizer.

Selecting the right mower with mulching attachments or features can save a great deal of time and help ensure a consistent layer of mulch across the yard.

### Composting

Creating a compost pile allows you to turn organic material into rich soil. The fall season is a good time to create a compost pile with decaying yard matter, such as vegetables, grass clippings and leaves, which can provide nutrient-rich soil for spring planting. For best results, alternate layers of "brown," or high carbon materials, with grass clippings.

### Bat Jack O'Melon

- ◆ 2 round watermelons, preferably yellow, for the body
- ◆ Kitchen and paring knives
- ◆ Cutting board
- ◆ Green dry-erase marker (preferably washable)
- ◆ Large bowl and spoon
- ◆ Candy corns
- ◆ 4 to 6-inch wooden skewers
- ◆ Toothpicks
- ◆ Candle or light



Photo courtesy of Family Features

Wash watermelons under cool running water and pat dry.

On a cutting board, place the roundest watermelon on its side and cut off 1/4 to 1/2 inch of the stem end, being careful not to cut too deep into the white part of the rind. This will provide a sturdy base.

Using dry-erase marker, draw two eyes, an oval for a nose and a smiling mouth that would resemble a bat. Draw two ears and an outline of a forehead, continuing the line around to make the top for the bat that will be removed.

Use a knife to carefully cut away inside of the eyes, nose and mouth and also around the top of watermelon. Remove top and hollow out watermelon with spoon, reserving fruit to use in a fruit salad or punch.

On the second watermelon, use dry-erase marker to draw 2 bat wings (the top of the wings will have 2 points and the bottom of the wings will have 2 points).

Use knife to carefully cut wings out, reserving inside of watermelon to make fruit salad or punch.

Attach wings to side of watermelon bat with wooden skewers, and use toothpicks to attach candy-corn as fangs.

Insert a candle to light up your bat.

Continued on page 8

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