

Tall Fescue

Lawn Maintenance Calendar

Tall fescue is a moderate-to-coarse-bladed, heavy-duty grass that tolerates a wide range of soil and shade conditions and has good heat, drought, and wear tolerance. Tall fescue has few serious pest problems but is subject to brown patch disease under warm, wet conditions. Tall fescue grows rapidly and requires frequent mowing but does not tolerate a close cut. It is a bunchgrass that does not recover well from injury and thus must be reseeded if bare areas appear. New cultivars referred to as "turf-type" tall fescues have been developed. These cultivars are more shade tolerant and finer leaved than standard K-31 variety. Maintenance programs provided by professional lawn care companies may differ from recommendations given here but yet be equally effective.

September through November

Mowing

Tall fescue should be 2½ to 3½ inches tall after mowing. As a general guideline, try to mow often enough that no more than one-third of the grass height is cut. Then practice grasscycling. Grasscycling is simply leaving grass clippings on your lawn. Grass clippings decompose quickly and can provide up to 25 percent of the lawn's fertilizer needs. If prolonged rain or other factors prevent mowing and clippings are too plentiful to leave on the lawn, they can be collected and used as mulch. Whatever you do, don't bag them! Grass clippings do not belong in landfills.

Fertilizing

The best way to determine your lawn's nutrient needs is by a soil test. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture, Agronomic Division, provides free soil testing. In the absence of a soil test, use a complete nitrogen-

phosphorus-potassium (N-P-K) turf-grade fertilizer with a 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 ratio (that is, 12-4-8 or 16-4-8). Fertilize with 1 pound of actual nitrogen (N) per thousand square feet in mid-September and again in November (about the time the grass is green but not actively growing).*

Irrigation

Water to a soil depth of 4 to 6 inches. Probe with a screwdriver to determine moisture depth. Tall fescue needs a weekly application of about 1 to 1¼ inches of water. On sandy soils it often requires more frequent watering—for example, ½ inch of water every third day. It is often necessary to irrigate an area for 3 to 5 hours to apply 1 inch of water. (It requires 640 gallons of water to deliver 1 inch of water per thousand square feet.) Because clay soils accept water slowly, irrigate just until runoff

* See box on page 3.

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occurs, wait ½ hour until the water has been absorbed, and then continue irrigating until the desired depth or amount is obtained. A dark bluish gray color, footprinting, and wilted, folded, or curled leaves indicate that it is time to water. Proper irrigation may prevent or reduce pest problems and environmental stress later in the summer.

Weed Control

Apply broadleaf herbicides to control dandelions and other weeds if necessary. Caution: Some herbicides may affect newly seeded turf. Follow label directions. See Extension Service publication AG-408, *Pest Control Recommendations for Turfgrass Managers*.

Insect Control

Check for white grubs in September and October and control them if necessary.

Aerification

Core lawns subject to heavy traffic or on clay soils to minimize compaction and improve rooting. Break up plugs.

Renovation

Piedmont and Coastal Plain Regions Only! (See June-August for western region.) Overseed thin, bare areas as grass begins to respond to cooler temperatures in September and early October. Use a blend of tall fescue cultivars at 6 pounds per thousand square feet. Apply a starter-type (high phosphorus) fertilizer at time of seeding. Keep the seedbed moist with light, frequent sprinklings several times a day to ensure good germination.

Thatch Removal

It is not necessary to remove thatch.

December through February

Mowing

Remove lawn debris (rocks, sticks, and leaves). Mow lawn inches and remove clipping debris at spring greenup. Mow before grass gets taller than 5 inches. Practice grasscycling—leave clippings on the lawn.

Fertilizing

Fertilize with 1 pound of actual nitrogen per thousand square feet in February.* In absence of soil test results, use a complete (N-P-K) turf-grade fertilizer with a 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 ratio.

Irrigation

Water, if needed, to prevent excessive drying. About 1 inch of water per application each week is adequate.

Weed Control

Apply broadleaf herbicides as necessary for control of chickweed, henbit, or other weeds. See Extension Service publication AG-408, *Pest Control Recommendations for Turfgrass Managers*.

Aerification

Delay coring until fall.

Thatch Removal

It is not necessary to remove thatch.

March through May

Mowing

Mow lawn to 3 inches in height. Mow at least once a week. Mow before grass gets above 5 inches tall. Remember grasscycling—leave clippings on the lawn.

Fertilizing

Do not fertilize tall fescue after March 15.

Irrigation

Water as needed to prevent drought. About 1 inch of water per application each week is adequate. Sandy soils often require more frequent watering, or about ½ inch of water every third day.

Weed Control

Apply preemergence herbicides to control crabgrass, goosegrass, and foxtail. Apply by the time the dogwoods

* See box on page 3.

are in bloom. See Extension Service publication AG-408, *Pest Control Recommendations for Turfgrass Managers*.

Insect Control

Check for white grubs in April and May and control if necessary.

Aerification

Delay coring until fall.

Thatch Removal

It is not necessary to remove thatch.

June Through August

Mowing

Raise mower height to 3½ inches. Mow before the grass gets above 5 inches tall. Remember grasscycling — leave clippings on the lawn.

Fertilizing

Do not fertilize tall fescue at this time. Submit a soil sample for analysis to determine nutrient requirements. (Contact your county Extension Center for details.)

Irrigation

Either water as needed to prevent drought or allow the lawn to go dormant. About 1 inch of water per application each week is adequate for irrigated lawns. Sandy soils require more frequent watering, or about ½ inch of water every third day. Do not discontinue irrigation in midsummer. Water dormant lawns every three weeks in the absence of rain.

Disease Control

Check for brown patch disease. (See Extension Service Publication AG-361, *Diseases of Cool-Season Grasses*.)

Weed Control

Avoid the use of herbicides at this time. See Extension Service publication AG-408, *Pest Control Recommendations for Turfgrass Managers*.

Insect Control

Check for grubs in July and August and control them if necessary.

Aerification

Avoid coring tall fescue lawns at this time.

Renovation

Western Region Only! (See September–November for piedmont and coastal plain regions.) Overseed thin, bare areas as grass begins to respond to cooler temperatures; about August 15 to September 1. Use a blend of tall fescue cultivars at 6 pounds per thousand square feet. Apply a starter-type fertilizer at the time of seeding. Keep the seedbed moist with light, frequent sprinklings several times a day to ensure good germination.

Thatch Removal

It is not necessary to remove thatch.

Calculating Fertilizer Application Rates

To determine the amount of product required to apply 1 pound of nitrogen per thousand square feet, divide 100 by the *first* number on the fertilizer bag.

Example 1: A 16-4-8 fertilizer. Dividing 100 by 16 = 6.25 pounds of product applied per thousand square feet to deliver 1 pound of nitrogen.

$$\frac{100}{16} = 6.25$$

Example 2: A 10-10-10 fertilizer. Dividing 100 by 10 = 10 pounds of product to be applied per thousand square feet to deliver 1 pound of nitrogen.

$$\frac{100}{10} = 10$$

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acts About Grass Clippings

- North Carolina state law prohibits disposal of yard wastes, including grass clippings, in landfills.
- Using grass clippings as a nutrient source for your lawn can save time and money and protect the environment.
- Grass clippings don't cause thatch.

The Grasscycling Concept

Leave grass clippings on the lawn! Grass clippings are 75 to 85 percent water and a good source of nutrients. When

left on the lawn after mowing, they quickly decompose and release nutrients. Through grasscycling, you can supply up to 25 percent of the lawn's yearly fertilizer needs, which means saving money and time. (And it means you don't have to rake and bag for hours.)

By following the management guidelines in this turf calendar and adding grasscycling to your routine, you will no longer need to bag clippings and your lawn will grow at an acceptable rate, retain a green color, and develop a deeper root system.

For more information on grasscycling, contact your county Cooperative Extension Center.

Integrated Pest Management: The Sensible Approach to Lawn Care

Many pest problems can cause your turf to look bad — diseases, weeds, insects, and animals. If you are really unlucky, you may have all of them at one time.

So what do you do? Use a pesticide? Or make changes in cultural practices? Both methods, and some others as well, may be needed. The balanced use of all available methods is called *Integrated Pest Management (IPM)*.

The idea is simple. It involves the use of all available prevention and control methods to keep pests from reaching damaging levels. The goal is to produce a good turf and minimize the influence of pesticides on man, the environment, and turf.

IPM methods include:

1. Use of best-adapted grasses.
2. Proper use of cultural practices such as watering, mowing, and fertilization.

3. Proper selection and use of pesticides when necessary.

Early detection and prevention, or both, will minimize pest damage, saving time, effort, and money. Should a problem occur, determine the cause or causes, then choose the safest, most effective control or controls available.

When chemical control is necessary, select the proper pesticide, follow label directions, and apply when the pest is most susceptible. Treat only those areas in need. Regard pesticides as only one of many tools available for turf care.

To learn more about integrated pest management, pest identification, turf care, and proper use of pesticides, contact your county Cooperative Extension Center.

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