

# Growing Green Lawns



Lawn care does not have to be complicated. Making simple changes in your lawn maintenance can provide the type of lawn you desire.

## Mowing

- Mow often when the turf is actively growing to avoid clumps and reduce stress on the grass. This may be more than once a week.
- Grass is healthiest when only  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the leaf blade is removed at a time.
- For cool season grasses, set the mower at its highest setting (2½-3 inches). Warm season grasses are mowed much shorter,  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1½ inches, depending on the species.

Mowing Guide	
Tall Fescue	2½ - 3½ in
Perennial Ryegrass	2½ - 3
Kentucky Bluegrass	2½ - 3
Fine Fescue	2½ - 3½
Bermudagrass	½ - 1
Zoysiagrass	½ - 1

- It's best to leave grass clippings on the lawn to return nitrogen (N) and organic matter to the soil. Sweep excess clippings off hard surfaces and back onto the lawn. If you collect clippings, recycle them. Do not discard them.
- Mow when the turf is dry.
- Do not mow drought stressed or dormant grass – this damages the turf.
- Keep mower blades sharp. Dull mower blades tear the grass instead of shearing it.

## Feeding Your Lawn

The primary objective of lawn fertilization is to produce acceptable quality turf with good stand density. If you see bare soil, then turf density needs to be increased. Correct fertilization will help increase turf density which will reduce soil erosion and prevent weed problems.

- Feed your lawn to keep it thick and healthy.
- Purchase a lawn fertilizer with a high percentage of slow-release nitrogen (N) and a low percentage of phosphorus (P).
- Read and follow instructions on the fertilizer bag.
- Always apply fertilizer at the spreader setting shown on the bag; any remaining fertilizer should be put back into the bag.
- Sweep any fertilizer off hard surfaces and back onto the lawn.
- The number of applications of fertilizer depends on:
  - o the type of grass you have
  - o the area of the country in which you live
  - o soil fertility
  - o age of the lawn
  - o whether you leave clippings on the lawn
  - o how you use your lawn

**Cool-season grasses** (Turf-type tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, fine fescues, or mixtures): fertilize in early fall, and do not apply fertilizer to frozen ground or dormant lawns.

**Warm-season grasses** (Zoysiagrass or Bermudagrass): fertilize in the summer during active growth.

Be very careful near environmentally sensitive areas such as bodies of water, streams, rivers, etc., and check for any local restrictions.



Northeastern Integrated Pest Management Center  
[www.northeastipm.org](http://www.northeastipm.org)

North Central Integrated Pest Management Center  
[www.ncipmc.org](http://www.ncipmc.org)



## Controlling Weeds in Your Lawn

Dense lawns can out-compete weeds. If grass is so thin that the ground is visible, weeds may move in and become established. Weeds may indicate a problem with low mowing height, poor fertility, shade, or watering practices.

If you are planning to control weeds in your lawn:

- Select a product labeled for lawn use.
- For few weeds: consider hand-pulling or a ready-to-use (RTU) product as a spot treatment.
- For many weeds: either treat the entire lawn yourself or hire a professional.
- Always follow label instructions for rates, mixing, application method, and safety precautions.
- For broadleaf weeds (dandelions, ground ivy, clover, and plantain): apply herbicides in the fall.
- For most annual grass weeds (crabgrass): apply a preemergent product in the spring.

Weed control may not be necessary every year. Strive for a thick, competitive lawn to reduce or eliminate the need for using herbicides. Treat weeds only as necessary.

## Turf Insects

- Determine the type and amount of damage. Most damage looks the same. Get down on your hands and knees and look closely at the damage, look for pests, and dig up a small section of turf to look for grubs.
- Identify the pest. Turf pests vary throughout the region based on the type of grass. It is important to identify the culprit, including the species of grub, to determine the most effective control measures.
- Grubs are the most common pests of northern grasses.
- Only apply an insecticide if you have a problem.
- Most insects are not a problem and are part of the landscape.

## Turf Diseases

- It is not practical to treat disease in home lawns with fungicides.
- Most lawns can tolerate a certain amount of disease without losing turf.
- Select the proper turf cultivar for your region to minimize disease problems.
- The best defense against diseases is to properly irrigate, fertilize, and follow maintenance practices to avoid stressing the turf.

Check with your local **Extension** office and local lawn professional for correct identification of weeds, insects, and diseases for specific recommendations on management.

To locate your local **Extension** office, go to: [csrees.usda.gov/Extension/index.html](https://csrees.usda.gov/Extension/index.html)

The Growing Green Lawns website at [growinggreenlawns.org](https://growinggreenlawns.org) provides a central location where people can find specific information on lawn care.\*

\*This information has been developed in cooperation with Northeast IPM (Integrated Pest Management) Center's Community IPM Working Group, Extension from the Land-Grant Universities in the Northeast and North Central Regions: (University of Connecticut, Cornell University, University of Delaware, University of the District of Columbia, University of Illinois, Iowa State University, Kansas State University, University of Maine, University of Maryland, University of Massachusetts, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, University of Missouri, University of Nebraska, University of New Hampshire, North Dakota State University, The Ohio State University, The Pennsylvania State University, Purdue University, University of Rhode Island, Rutgers University, South Dakota State University, University of Vermont, West Virginia University, and University of Wisconsin) and Audubon International, Environmental Protection Agency, Longwood Gardens, Water Quality Regions (I and III), Scotts Miracle-Gro Company, Seascope, Inc., and TruGreen.

For more information regarding the development of this document, contact: Richard Johnson (Penn State University, [rhj3@psu.edu](mailto:rhj3@psu.edu)), Mary Kay Malinoski (University of Maryland, [mkmal@umd.edu](mailto:mkmal@umd.edu)) and David Clement (University of Maryland, [clement@umd.edu](mailto:clement@umd.edu)) of the Community IPM Working Group of the Northeastern IPM Center and Susan Ratcliffe, (University of Illinois, [sratclif@ad.uiuc.edu](mailto:sratclif@ad.uiuc.edu)) of the North Central IPM Center.