

Mowing Plan

When proper mowing frequency is maintained, clippings filter into the turf canopy without detracting from the beauty of the lawn or increasing the thatch layer.

When mowing, follow the “one-third rule” by removing no more than one-third of the vegetation (from the soil line to the leaf tips) during any one mowing operation.



For most Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, zoysia and fine fescue lawns, a mowing height of 2½–3 inches is desirable all season long.

Turf-type tall fescue lawns should be mowed slightly higher: 3–3½ inches.

Buffalograss lawns offer a great deal of flexibility, from 3–9 inches, depending on the purpose and desired turf appearance.

For the most part, it’s best to return clippings back to the lawn when mowing using a mulching type mower. If the turf is excessively tall, such as after a long vacation, bagging the clippings and placing them on a compost pile is a wise step. Grass clippings also make a good mulching material for flower beds and vegetable gardens in thin layers.



Photos: Vicki Jedlicka, Nebraska Extension

Maintenance Plan

- **When overseeding, irrigate lightly and frequently.** The new turf plants have a shallow root system, so water amounts and timing should be adjusted accordingly.
- **Reduce thatch layers with a power rake** if they exceed .75", and prior to overseeding.

Cool Season Grasses

Kentucky Bluegrass, Tall Fescue
(Perennial Ryegrass is often included as a component in cool season grass mixtures but is not recommended as a stand alone turf)

Maintenance	Timing
Seeding/ Overseeding	KENTUCKY BLUEGRASS: April 15–May 10 or Aug. 20–Sep. 20 (<i>preferred</i>) TALL FESCUE: April 15–May 10 (<i>preferred</i>) or Aug. 15–30
Aerating (to increase water infiltration)	April/May or Sep./ Oct.
Power Raking (to reduce thatch)	April or Sep.

Warm Season Grasses

Buffalograss, Zoysiagrass

Maintenance	Timing
Seeding/Plugging	May 20–June 20
Aerating (to increase water infiltration)	June
Power Raking (to reduce thatch)	June



For more information about lawn care, check out Backyard Farmer’s turf videos online at <http://byf.unl.edu/turf>



EXTENSION

Lawn Care in Eastern Nebraska



Mowing Plan
Maintenance Plan
Fertilization Plan
Water Plan

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Fertilization Plan

Fertilizer application rate, frequency of application and nitrogen source determine how fast a lawn grows, as well as its density and overall appearance. The following fertilization plan is designed as a middle ground approach, producing turf with a reasonable rate of growth and attractive color.

Grass Species	Timing	Nitrogen lb per 1,000 sq. ft.
Kentucky Bluegrass, Tall Fescue, Perennial Ryegrass ¹	April 15–25	0.5–0.75 lb
Buffalograss, Zoysiagrass ²	May 5–15	0.5 lb
Kentucky Bluegrass, Tall Fescue, Perennial Ryegrass ¹	June 1–5 ³	0.75–1.0 lb
Zoysiagrass ²	July 4	0.5 lb
Kentucky Bluegrass, Tall Fescue, Perennial Ryegrass ¹	Sept. 1–5	0.75–1.0 lb
Kentucky Bluegrass, Tall Fescue, Perennial Ryegrass ¹	Oct. 28–Nov. 5 ³	0.25–0.5 lb

¹Cool Season Grasses ²Warm Season Grasses

³In advance of summer and winter stress periods, fertilizer ratios of 1-0-1 such as 19-0-16 can be beneficial

- For steady, even growth, use a fertilizer product containing a slow release nitrogen source such as **sulfur coated urea** or **urea formaldehyde**. Quick release nitrogen sources, such as urea, ammonium nitrate or ammonium sulfate, produce fast growth for short periods of time. In many cases, a mixture of each produces the best results. Check the fertilizer label to determine the specific nitrogen source.
- **Consider eliminating summer fertilizer applications to cool season grasses** to produce less growth and moisture loss.

Amount of Fertilizer

The amount of fertilizer to apply can be easily calculated. Divide the pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. desired by the first number in the fertilizer analysis expressed as a percentage. The result of this calculation provides the amount of fertilizer product to apply over 1,000 square feet of turfgrass.

Desired Nitrogen lb per 1,000 sq. ft.	Example Analysis (N-P-K) (nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium)	Fertilizer Product Needed per 1,000 sq. ft.
1.0 lb	28-3-6	3.6 lb
0.75 lb	28-3-6	2.7 lb
0.5 lb	28-3-6	1.8 lb
0.25 lb	28-3-6	0.9 lb

Next, simply multiply the amount of fertilizer product needed by the number of 1,000 sq. ft. units in your lawn. For example, if 1.0 lb N/1,000 sq. ft. is desired on a 5,000 sq. ft. lawn, using a 28-3-6 fertilizer analysis, multiply 3.6 by 5 to determine that 18 lb of fertilizer should be applied to the lawn.



Water Plan

In order to make each drop count, water the lawn with these two guiding principles:

- 1) Water to the bottom of the roots.
- 2) Keep the roots moist, not soggy or dry.

- **In general, existing Kentucky bluegrass lawns require more applied irrigation water in the summer than in spring and fall.** In eastern Nebraska, the estimated water requirement for Kentucky bluegrass lawns is 0.75 inches per week in April and May, 1.0 inch in June, 1.5 inches in July and August and 0.75 inches in September and October. Natural rainfall amounts should be subtracted from these weekly estimates. Well established tall fescue lawns usually perform well with about 50–70% as much water as Kentucky bluegrass.
- **Water to the bottom of the roots.** Use a screwdriver, trowel, small shovel or soil probe to determine how deep the roots are and how far the water has soaked in. Try to keep the soil moist about a half-inch deeper than the deepest living roots.
- **For cool season turf, water deeper and less frequently in spring and fall, and shallower and more frequently in summer** as turf roots are deeper in spring and fall and shallower in summer.
- **Measure the amount of water applied** in a 15, 20 or 30 minute period using collection devices such as empty tuna or cat food cans. Adjust the runtime to deliver the required amount. Change the runtime seasonally and remember to subtract any rainfall.
- **Observe your automatic sprinkler system at least once per month.** Look for heads that don't turn, that spray the street or sidewalk, bent or damaged heads, and clogged or worn nozzles. Make repairs as necessary.
- **Adjust heads as landscape plants grow larger and begin to block the spray pattern.** New installations of benches, decks, etc. can also decrease irrigation efficiency.
- **When watering on a slope, use "delayed starts."** Run sprinklers until you notice runoff, then stop. Wait three hours, then resume.
- **Water in the early morning (4–10 a.m.).** Watering is more efficient in the morning due to less evaporation and low wind speed. The worst time to water is in the evening, because the lawn stays wet all night, which encourages foliar and root disease development.
- **Return grass clippings to the lawn using a mulching type mower.** Clippings are a good nutrient source and help to conserve moisture.

Managing Dormant Turf

- **Consider allowing Kentucky bluegrass and buffalograss lawns to go dormant** in summer when rainfall is insufficient to support active growth. Irrigate dormant turf with 1/4 inch applications every two weeks to prevent death of the dormant crowns.
- **Minimize foot traffic and mowing on dormant turf.**
- **Tall fescue lawns do not recover well if allowed to go dormant** in severe drought conditions.

Photo: Moon Man Mike, Flickr

