

Tall Fescue Lawn Maintenance Calendar

NC STATE EXTENSION

Lawn Maintenance Calendars

These suggested management practices will help you care for your lawn throughout the year. Location, terrain, soil type and condition, age of lawn, previous lawn care, and other factors affect turf performance, so adjust the following management practices and dates to suit your particular lawn.

March Through May

Mowing

Mow to 2½ to 3½ inches. Mow often enough so that no more than one-third of the grass height is cut; this may be every 5 to 7 days in late spring. Leave grass clippings on the lawn where they 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, collect them and use them as mulch. DO NOT bag them for trash collection; grass clippings do not belong in landfills.

Fertilization

DO NOT fertilize tall fescue after March 15.

Watering

Tall fescue needs 1 to 1¼ inches of water every week, ideally NOT all at once. A dark bluish-gray color and wilted, folded, or curled leaves indicate that it is time to water. Water until the soil is wet to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Use a screwdriver or similar implement to check. Sandy soils require more frequent watering (about ½ inch of water every third day). Because clay soils accept water slowly, irrigate just until runoff occurs, wait until the water has been absorbed, and begin watering again. Continue until the desired depth or amount is applied. Proper irrigation may prevent or reduce problems later in the summer. Watering between 2 and 8 a.m. decreases the incidence of certain diseases.

Weed Control

Apply preemergence herbicides to control crabgrass, goosegrass, and foxtail. Apply by the time dogwoods are in bloom. (See [*Pest Control Recommendations for Turfgrass Managers*](#), AG-408).

Insect Control

Check for and control white grubs in April and May. (See [*White Grub Control in Turf*](#), AG-366).

Aeration

Delay aeration until fall.

Thatch Removal

It is generally not necessary to remove thatch.

June Through August

Mowing

Mow to 3½ inches and mow before the grass gets taller than 5 inches.

Fertilization

DO NOT fertilize tall fescue at this time.

Watering

Either water as needed to prevent drought stress or allow the lawn to go dormant. Dormant lawns must be watered once every 3 weeks during a drought.

Disease Control

Tall fescue is highly susceptible to brown (large) patch disease, which appears as irregularly shaped patches of dead or dying turf. Brown patch likes high humidity and temperatures above 85°F. It becomes extremely severe during prolonged, overcast wet weather with evening air temperatures above 68°F. and daytime temperatures in the mid- to upper 80s. Do not apply nitrogen fertilizer when the disease is active, keep the mowing height above 3 inches, and water between 2 and 8 am. Apply fungicide during severe brown patch outbreaks. (See *Diseases of Cool-Season Grasses*, AG-361.)

Weed Control

DO NOT use herbicides at this time.

Insect Control

Check for and control white grubs in July and August.

Aeration

DO NOT aerate tall fescue lawns at this time.

Renovation

Western region only! Overseed thin, bare areas as weather cools (August 15 to September 1). Use a blend of “turf-type” tall fescue cultivars at 6 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet, and apply a starter-type (high phosphorous) fertilizer. Keep the seedbed moist with light watering several times per day. Do not let the seedlings dry out.

September Through November

Mowing

Mow to 2½ to 3 inches in height.

Fertilization

Have your soil tested. Ask your county Extension agent about a free soil test. Then apply the nutrient your lawn needs. If you don't test, apply 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 1,000 square feet in mid-September and again in November (about the time the grass is green but not actively growing).

You need to apply 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, so how much fertilizer do you need to buy? Divide 100 by the FIRST number of the fertilizer bag. (The first number always represents nitrogen content.) For example, if you've got a 10-10-10 fertilizer, divide 100 by 10 and you get 10. That means you need to buy 10 pounds of fertilizer for every 1,000 square feet of lawn.

Watering

Water following guidelines for March through May.

Weed Control

Apply broadleaf herbicides to control broadleaf weeds like chickweed, henbit, and other weeds as necessary. Caution: Some herbicides may affect newly seeded turf. Follow label directions. (See [*Pest Control Recommendations for Turfgrass Managers*](#), AG-408.)

Insect Control

Check for white grubs in September and October; fall is the ideal time to control white grubs. (See [*White Grub Control in Turf*](#), AG-366.)

Aeration

Aerate lawns that are subject to heavy traffic or on clay soils. Remove plugs and break them up to put the soil back into the lawn.

Renovation

Piedmont and coastal plain regions only! Overseed thin, bare areas as weather cools (August 15 to September 1). Use a blend of "turf-type" tall fescue cultivars at 6 pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet, and apply a starter-type (high phosphorus) fertilizer. Keep the seedbed moist with light watering several times per day. Do not let the seedlings dry out.

December Through February

Mowing

Mow to 3 inches and remove leaves and other debris.

Fertilization

Fertilize with 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in February.

Watering

Water following guidelines for March through May.

Weed Control

Apply broadleaf herbicides as necessary for control of chickweed, henbit, or other weeds.

More About Tall Fescue

Tall fescue is a moderate- to coarse-bladed grass that can be grown in the shade and in many soil types. It tolerates heat and drought. It is subject to brown (large) patch, especially in prolonged periods of warm, wet conditions. Tall fescue grows rapidly and requires frequent mowing but does not tolerate close mowing. It does not recover well from excessive wear or pest injury, so it must be re-seeded if damage is excessive. Many new “turf-type” tall fescues are available at many home and garden centers. Improved fescues tolerate more shade and closer mowing. They have a finer leaf texture, better shoot density, and a darker green color than the old standard Kentucky-31.

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