



Turfgrass Calendar: Cool-season Bluegrass, Perennial Ryegrass, Fescues

The cool-season lawn calendar starts in late summer or early fall because this is the optimal time for fertilizing cool-season lawns. It is also the best time to create or renovate a cool-season lawn.

Late August – Early September

- Soil test established lawns every three years to discover which nutrients your lawn needs besides nitrogen. Test results indicating high to very high rates of phosphorus and potassium suggest fall fertilizing with only nitrogen.
- August and September are the best months for applying herbicides because plants are actively moving food down to roots.

September

- To prepare the lawn for annual aeration, first rake up debris and mow the lawn down to 2" (lower than usual!), bagging the clippings. If you have them, mark irrigation and cable lines.
- Next, just before aeration, apply organic, granulated *Espoma Chicken Manure 3-2-3* or *Milorganite 5-2-0*. Directions on the packages will help you with application rates for any fertilizer once you know your square footage.
- Finally, spread compost and *Turface* on the entire lawn.
- If overseeding is needed, see our tip sheet *Fall Renovation of Cool-season Turfgrass* at this point.
- Core aerate the entire lawn to loosen compacted soil, increase nutrient and water absorption and remove thatch.
- Ideally, make two or three passes with the aerator, working the amendments (and seed) into the soil.
- As you walk behind the aerator you will help with this mixing. The cores themselves will act as a topdressing.

October

- Begin fall clean-up: rake and remove all leaves and debris and add to your compost pile.
- If leaves are not abundant, mulch into the lawn with a mulching mower. Never mulch more than ½" of leaves at one time.
- Always remove leaves from newly seeded lawns – a blower works best for this.
- A second application of fertilizer may be added one month after your September application.
- Mow at 3½" until the end of October.

November

- Turn off irrigation around November 1st. Watch for weather changes and hand water if necessary.
- Continue with fall clean-up to prevent damage to grass.
- A third application of fertilizer may be added one month after your October application.
- The very last mowing in November can be very low at 2".

December/January/February

- Avoid using road salt which can damage lawns and nearby plants.
- Avoid foot traffic on frozen lawns.

March

- When grass and soil are dry, rake to remove dead grass, leaves and other debris.
- Early March, weather permitting, mow the lawn a little shorter than usual at 2”-2½” and bag up clippings and debris.
- Never scalp the lawn to “wake it up” – this actually will encourage grass roots to shrink!
- After the 3rd mowing, start mulching the clippings, move blade up to 3”-3½” and keep it at this height through the summer.
- If you missed your fall fertilization, use an organic fertilizer in March.
- Shady lawns and low-maintenance lawns should not be fertilized in spring or early summer as this causes more shoot growth rather than root growth.
- If you were unable to overseed in the fall, spring is the next best option for thin lawns and bare spots.
- Aeration and fertilization in spring is a backup option as well if you did not do this in fall.
- If you are seeding in the spring, don’t treat for crabgrass until the new seed has been mowed 2-3 times.

April/May

- Apply pre-emergent crabgrass preventer as the soil warms up. If you don’t have a soil thermometer, watch for nighttime temperatures of more than 50° for 3 successive days. This usually happens before April 15th.
- Corn-gluten based products are an organic option. Neither of these should be used when seeding, however.
- Consider a ½” top dressing of compost. Add organic matter to soil by using a mulching mower and leaving grass clippings on the lawn.
- Keep a sharp blade to reduce disease susceptibility. Mow frequently to remove no more than one-third of the turf height at each mowing. Taller grass will shade out weeds.

June/July/August

- Apply an organic fertilizer in late June on high-maintenance lawns such as bluegrass.
- Shady lawns and low-maintenance lawns will wait until the fall fertilization.
- High-maintenance lawns will need 1” of water per week and will be damaged by inadequate water. Deep watering for 30 to 45 minutes, twice a week is recommended if it doesn’t rain.
- Low-maintenance lawns will make do with rainfall, go dormant during drought and, if kept healthy and foot traffic is minimal, will bounce back when the rain returns.
- Stay vigilant with weeds, hand-digging or spot-spraying. Do not spray when air temperatures reach 80°- 85°.
- Dense, healthy grass that is actively growing will be less susceptible to turfgrass diseases.