

Lawn Tips

Bermuda grass guidelines for April-May

- Spring green-up can be assisted by close mowing early in the season. Once the first signs of new growth appear, scalp the lawn as low as conditions allow. This will not harm the lawn at all. In fact it helps the situation by allowing more sunlight and warmth to reach the soil.
- Apply a balanced fertilizer (such as 10-10-10) after the lawn is 50% green.
- If you didn't apply pre-emergent earlier in the spring, go ahead and do it now. This will help prevent summer crabgrass.

Bermuda grass guidelines for June-July-August

- Apply a high nitrogen fertilizer (such as 32-5-7) every 4 to 6 six weeks as needed. An alternative is to apply ammonium nitrate (34-0-0) at 3 to 4 week intervals. Each of these would be applied at 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet.
- Selective herbicides containing fertilizer (weed and feed) may be used to eradicate weed infestations when necessary. Due to the aggressive growth, a healthy bermuda lawn will normally have very few weeds.
- The lawn needs the equivalent of 1 inch of water per week to thrive.
- Maintain a consistent mowing schedule. Properly fertilized lawns will require mowing twice each week to maintain a healthy turf.

Bermuda grass guidelines for September-October

- Apply a low nitrogen/high potassium fertilizer (such as 8-15-20 or 5-14-14) in September. This will be the LAST fertilization before the grass enters dormancy. The prominent element (third number) of this application is potash, which nourishes the roots before the winter season arrives.
- Apply pre-emergent in early September to prevent fall and winter weeds. It can still be applied in October, but you may miss the window for preventing all weed types. Better late than never. If you plan to overseed with ryegrass, DO NOT apply pre-emergent at this time.
- If you have had problems with moles, apply grub control in September. Moles feed off the grubs created by the Japanese beetles in the summer. The grubs will eventually move deeper in the soil as the weather cools. By applying grub control now, you can help eliminate most of the mole's food source in your lawn. He will then look for a better place to eat.
- Continue watering the lawn on a regular basis, especially if dry weather persists. October is usually our driest month and the windy conditions dry out the soil much faster.
- Raise your mower height slightly as October approaches. This will be less stressful on the root system and lessen the chances of winter kill.

Fertilizing

Bermuda grass requires a high amount of nitrogen (N) to thrive during the growing season. When selecting fertilizer, N is first number in the sequence such as 10-10-10. During the summer months you should apply fertilizer with N content of 30 or higher, such as 32-5-7. Alternatively, you can apply ammonium nitrate 34-0-0 as pure N source. An advantage to ammonium nitrate is cost, as it is much cheaper than the typical fertilizer. A disadvantage to ammonium nitrate is that it lacks the slow release qualities of a regular fertilizer, which results in the need for more frequent

applications. Full fertilizers with slow release qualities will need applying at 4-6 week intervals, while ammonium nitrate should be applied every 3-4 weeks.

Regardless of the option you choose, the application rate is the same. Apply 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet. This is simple to calculate when dividing 100 by the N component of the fertilizer. So if you used 34-0-0, you would need to apply roughly 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet. For these reasons, it is very helpful to know the total square footage of your lawn.

Fertilizers with high sources of N can burn your lawn if not watered in properly. After applying, the lawn should be watered thoroughly as soon as possible. A good practice is to apply the fertilizer in the evening and then water thoroughly the next morning. The best method, obviously, is to apply it just before expected rainfall.

It is very important not to over-apply the fertilizer, doing so can cause severe damage to the lawn.

Watering

Your lawn needs 1 inch of rain each week during the summer months. One inch may not sound like much, but that is equivalent to 620 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet. The typical lawn is about 5,000 square feet, so you can do the math there. It is very difficult to apply that much water manually by using traditional hoses and sprinklers. Underground sprinkler systems can deliver that volume of water, but not without a major impact on your water bill. The bottom line is that during periods of dry weather, do the best you can with the situation.

Anyone serious about maintaining a good lawn should own a rain gauge. This is a simple way to know when your lawn needs water and when it does not. Never water just because it is hot, the rain gauge never lies.

One of the most common mistakes made in watering is applying it too frequently at a shallow depth. The roots of the lawn will grow to the depth of the water, so watering for short periods every day or two will promote a weak root system. The key is to apply the water all at once, which encourages the roots to grow deeper. The result will be a healthier, more drought-tolerant lawn. An exception to this is newly sodded lawns which should be watered several times daily to avoid drying of the roots.

Without a doubt, the most serious watering mistake is applying water during the evening hours. While this is the most convenient time for homeowners, it promotes the development of disease in your lawn. If the lawn remains moist while dew develops in the evening, the humid conditions create perfect environment for fungus. There are many types of lawn fungus, each of them will kill parts of your lawn and are difficult to cure. Lawns should be watered in the early morning hours, so if you choose to water in the evening it is a risk.

Bare spots

Bare spots are common in many newer lawns that are not as well established. This situation can be remedied by the application of river sand. River sand contains nutrients that encourage the bermuda to grow, as well as providing a medium for the roots to spread. Don't be afraid to apply this a couple of inches deep to level out the area if necessary. Avoid using the play sand or construction sand as they lack the natural nutrients of the river sand.

Mowing

For optimal turf, bermuda should be mowed at 1 1/2 inches or less. A reel-type mower is preferred. Rotary-type mowers are more commonly used but typically cannot mow the grass at the proper height without scalping. Adding to the problem, many builders do not install the sod properly on a smooth grade which also makes mowing more troublesome. Top dressing with sand is the only way to alleviate that problem.

In any event, never mow more than 1/3 of the blade height to prevent shocking the lawn. Should the lawn grow excessively during wet periods, additional mowing will be necessary before returning to the original height. Raise the mower height initially and lower every couple of days until the original height is reached.

Maintaining sharp blades is also very important to the health of the lawn. Dull blades will tear the grass, making it more susceptible to disease and drought damage. Blades should be sharpened every three months depending on frequency of use.