

Virginia Cooperative Extension

A partnership of Virginia Tech and Virginia State University

 **VirginiaTech**
College of Agriculture
and Life Sciences



School of Agriculture
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Simple Lawn Care Schedule

For fescue and bluegrass lawns

This schedule is meant to be a guide to what to do for your lawn and when. Holidays have been used as reminders more than hard and fast dates for these activities to be done. Contact your local Extension office if you have any questions.

Sometime before Labor Day

- Evaluate your lawn. Do you have 50% or more weeds or weedy grasses? If the answer is yes, you might choose a more extensive renovation. Call the Horticulture Help Line at 703 792-7747.
- The **most important element** in lawn care is a soil test! Sample your soil so that you can mail it on around August 15; the results will be back in time for your fall lawn care tasks.
- Measure the square footage of your lawn so that you can calculate seed, lime and fertilizer amounts. Do not include paved areas or garden beds. Ask for the publication, "Calculating Turfgrass Amendments" from the Hort Help Line at 703 792-7747.
- Reserve a core aerator from your local rental supply store. Go in with your neighbors on one!
- Have your weeds identified before deciding on control strategies to eliminate wasting time and money. (Take samples to the Extension office weekdays from 8am – 5pm or to Chinn Library on Tuesdays, between 6:30 and 8:00pm.) Some herbicides can interfere with your overseeding; consult the Horticulture Help Line if you have questions.

Around Labor Day

- Core aerate your lawn. If the soil is very dry be sure to water your lawn the day before you aerate. (Core aerators can be rented at garden centers for about \$80/day or \$60/4 hours. They pull plugs of soil out allowing air and nutrients to more easily enter your soil and combat against soil compaction.) If you are not able to core aerate, use a rake, vertical mower or dethatching machine to ensure good seed-to-soil contact. **Golf shoes will not work!**
- Level uneven areas with high quality topsoil or compost.
- Add ¼ to ½ inch compost to entire lawn.
- Overseed the entire lawn with the appropriate seed for shady or sunny conditions. Read the bag of seed for best conditions. Overseed at a minimum rate of 2 -3 pounds per 1000 square feet of lawn area.
- Fill in bare spots with extra seed.
- Do not fertilize at this time.
- **WATER, WATER, WATER!** Your freshly planted seed will need to be watered lightly, about ½ inch of water, everyday and possibly twice a day. Seeds should not be allowed to dry out. ***If you do not intend to water your lawn your renewal will not be successful!***
- After germination the seedlings will still need to be watered frequently.
- Try to minimize traffic on the new lawn.

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Around the Columbus Day Weekend

- Calibrate your spreader, using manufacturer's instructions or refer to Virginia Tech publication number 430-017 (available on line at www.ext.vt.edu).
- Apply fertilizer at recommended rates on soil test result or at a rate of 1 pound of nitrogen (N) per thousand square feet of lawn. If you don't already have it, request the publication, "Calculating Turfgrass Amendments" from the Hort Help Line at 703 792-7747. Don't like doing the math? Ask about our Great 'Scapes program.)
- Add lime, if recommended, at rates from the soil test. Lime can only be applied at a maximum rate of 50 lbs of lime every 30 days. If the recommended amount of lime is greater than 50, you will need to make subsequent applications spaced at least 30 days apart.
- Seedlings should be established and water is recommended at ½ inch every 2 to 3 days, unless weather dictates more frequent watering.
- Grass can be mowed once seedlings are 3 to 4 inches. Use a sharp lawnmower blade or seedlings may be pulled up. Maintain grass at the correct height.
- As leaves begin to fall onto your lawn: If you have few leaves, chop them finely with a mulching mower. If you have many leaves, remove them for recycling into compost.

Around Veteran's Day Weekend

- Fertilize according to soil test recommendation, for a second, single pound of nitrogen per thousand square feet.
- Did your soil test recommendation call for more than one, 50-lb application? Make another application now.

Other Weekends in Fall and Winter

- If subsequent applications of lime are needed, make application anytime that the ground is not frozen. Once you have applied the total amount recommended on your soil test results, you are finished until you test again in 2 or 3 years.

Around Memorial Day Weekend

- If you did not fertilize in the fall, or if your lawn is struggling to get established, fertilize to apply ½ pound of nitrogen per thousand square feet of lawn area. Be prepared to mow!
- Put the other fall lawn care tasks on your calendar.

Shopping List

1. Grass seed (fescue mix or fescue/bluegrass mix) - appropriate to your sun or shade conditions. Purchase 2 – 4 pounds for each thousand of square feet of lawn area.
2. Fertilizer with the nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium, recommended in your soil test results. Purchase enough for your 2 applications, based on your calculations, and store leftover amounts in a dry place.
3. Compost - sold at the Prince William County composting facility on Ball's Ford Road or at garden centers in bags. To calculate how much to purchase, figure 0.75 cubic yard for each thousand square foot of lawn area.

Other Considerations

Once your lawn is established, you will only need to apply a top dressing of compost and return your grass clippings. Soil test again in 3 years.