

GROWING AND MAINTAINING QUALITY TURFGRASS

WATERING: Regular, consistent watering is critical to the success of your new lawn. Newly seeded lawns will require light watering for the first 2 to 3 weeks, for as long as it takes the grass seed to germinate. Fifteen or twenty minutes of watering per day in an area will be sufficient to keep the grass seed moist and induce germination. Watering should be done daily and should produce germination in 10 to 14 days. Water in the mornings, if possible, to reduce the incidence of disease.

After the seed has germinated, reduce the frequency of watering to every 2-3 days. Allow for longer watering intervals, such as 45 minutes to an hour. At this point, the seedlings need to establish roots; longer watering periods that soak the soil deeply will encourage the young seedlings to establish themselves and promote a deeper root system. Continue watering your turf until it has been mowed three times; after the third mowing it should be able to stand on its own without supplemental watering. Note, however, that in periods of prolonged dryness or drought, especially in the first year, additional watering may be necessary to keep the turf healthy and thriving.

ESTABLISHING SODDED LAWNS: Sodded lawns need a longer interval of watering right from the start, as it is trying to reproduce the roots lost during its transplant from the growing field to your yard. A minimum interval of 1/2 hour per day is recommended for new sod. A good test to measure the moisture is the sod should be squishy and almost too wet to walk on. Always water in the mornings, if possible. Morning watering allows the sod adequate time to dry off before sundown brings cooler temperatures, and can help prevent the incidence of 'brown patch' disease in the turf.

MOWING: Once the lawn has grown to a height of three inches, begin mowing it on a regular schedule. Regular mowing helps to thicken the turf and promote greater root growth. Set your mower to cut the grass to a height of 2.5 to 3 inches. Tall fescue should never be mowed very short. It should be mowed often enough so that you are not removing more than one-third of the grass blade when it is cut. We recommend that you do not bag your clippings. Allowing the clippings to fall when you mow returns elements to the soil, and adds organic matter, which gradually improves the quality of the soil.

THATCH: Thatch is the accumulation of dead and dying grass plants that form between the soil and the living plants. It is not clippings that are left on the ground. Thatch is generally not a problem with tall fescue lawns. Lawns with significant amounts of bluegrass and fine fescue, or zoysia, will need to be dethatched periodically, typically every 3-4 years. Annual core aeration is the best prevention against the formation of thatch.

LIME: A soil test will indicate whether your lawn needs lime. Avoid regular applications of lime without the benefit of a soil test. Over-applying lime will deposit excess magnesium in the soil, and can have an adverse effect on the soil structure.

AERATION: This is a vital component in the maintenance of your lawn. Annual aeration provides many cultural benefits, such as increased root growth, enhance utilization of fertilizers and water by the grass plants, reduction and prevention of thatch buildup, and relief of soil compaction. Turfgrass grown in heavy soils, such as the clay here in central Virginia, will benefit from aeration at least once per year.

FERTILIZATION: We strongly recommend that you fertilize your lawn in the fall ONLY. Three application in the fall months will provide all the nitrogen and other elements that your turf will need for the year. Fall fertilization promotes root development, carbohydrate storage, and darker color the following spring. Again, a soil test will provide guidance as to the specific type of fertilizer that is right for your lawn. We strongly recommend avoiding both spring and summer applications of fertilizer, which can dramatically increase incidence of disease and contribute to greater weed infestation.

GROWING AND MAINTAINING QUALITY TURFGRASS IN SHADED AREAS

Once you have seeded or sodded an area of your lawn that receives a significant amount of shade, it will pay you to tailor your management program to accommodate the particular cultural requirements of growing grass in the shade. Listed below are a few suggestions worth incorporating into your routine.

OVERSEED WITH SHADE TOLERANT GRASSES: Tall fescue, such as Rebel and Rebel II will be moderately successful in shade. Other grasses, such as hard, fine or chewings fescue are the best choices. Generally, they have finer leaf blades and exhibit better tolerance to shade. Trade names include Jamestown, Reliant, and Banner. Always seed shaded areas in the fall.

RAISE THE MOWING HEIGHT: In a reduced light situation the objective is to maximize the health of the individual plants. Low mowing tends to increase density, but results in reduced health of the turf. Raising the mower height makes turf slightly less dense, but healthier overall.

IRRIGATE INFREQUENTLY BUT HEAVILY: A watering program which minimizes the amount of time shaded areas are moist is beneficial in reducing disease incidence. Infrequent watering will also tend to minimize the probability of compaction and not favor shallow rooting.

PROVIDE AS MUCH LIGHT AS POSSIBLE TO THE TURF: Remove unnecessary trees that are not essential to your landscape plan. Judicious pruning to maximize the light penetration to the turf will also help.

REMOVE LEAVES AND DEBRIS PROMPTLY: Quick removal of leaves and debris all year long is essential, as they only serve to shade the turfgrass plant and reduce its food- making potential. Fall leaf removal is most critical to the production of quality turf in shade.