

Bermudagrass Lawn Maintenance Calendar

NC STATE EXTENSION

Lawn Maintenance Calendars

Introduction

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

March Through May

Mowing

Mow when the lawn first turns green using a rotary or reel mower set as low as possible without scalping the lawn. Mow the grass before it grows taller than 2½ inches. This initial mowing will remove excess dormant tissue and establish the desired mowing height for the year. Leave nutrient-rich grass clippings on the lawn unless they are unsightly or clumped. If grass clippings are too plentiful, collect and use them as mulch.

Fertilization

Apply nutrients based on soil testing. Contact [your local North Carolina Cooperative Extension center](#) for soil testing information. In the absence of a soil test, apply ½ to 1 pound of nitrogen (N) per 1,000 square feet several weeks after the lawn turns fully green (typically between early April and May).

You need to apply ½ pound of N per 1,000 square feet, so how much fertilizer do you need to buy? Divide 50 by the FIRST number on the fertilizer bag. (The first number always represents N content.) For example, if you've got a 5-5-15 fertilizer, divide 50 by 5 and you get 10. That means you need to buy 10 pounds of fertilizer for every 1,000 square feet of lawn.

Watering

When bermudagrass is growing, supplement rainfall as needed so that the lawn gets about 1 inch of water each week. A bluish-gray appearance or wilted, folded, or curled leaves may indicate that it is time to water. Use a screwdriver or similar implement to check for proper saturation. Sandy soils require more frequent watering (about ½ inch of water every third day). In clay soils, which 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 a.m. and 8 a.m. decreases the incidence of certain diseases.

Weed Control

Apply preemergence herbicides from mid-February to early March. Apply postemergence herbicides in May as needed to control summer annual and perennial broadleaf weeds like white clover, knotweed, spurge, and lespedeza. Products containing two or three different broadleaf weed herbicides are more effective in controlling broadleaf weeds in the lawn. Be sure the product you choose is labeled for use on bermudagrass. See the NC State Extension publication [*Pest Control for Professional Turfgrass Managers*](#) for more information.

Insect Control

White grubs may be active at this time, but spring curative applications are not effective. Make note of areas with white grub activity and plan to apply a preventive application in the following spring or early summer. Specific timing will vary depending on white grub species, so plan to make an application when adult flight is at its peak. See the NC State Extension publication [*White Grubs in Turf*](#) for specific recommendations.

Disease Control

As bermudagrass breaks dormancy, spring dead-spot may appear as circular patches of tan or brown sunken turf. Patches may be 2 inches to 3 feet in diameter and typically appear on turf that is 3 to 5 years old. Apply N monthly from mid-May to mid-August to promote recovery, and map affected areas for possible fungicide treatment in the fall. Core aeration and removing excessive thatch may help avoid future problems with spring dead-spot.

Thatch Removal

If thatch (a layer of undecomposed grass) is thicker than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, power rake (vertical mow) in late May. Vertical mow only after the lawn has completely greened up, or recovery will be very slow.

Renovation

In late May, start replanting bare or worn areas using sod or sprigs (three to five bushels per 1,000 square feet). Common bermudagrass can be planted using bermudagrass seed at 1 to 2 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Keep the seedbed continually moist with light, frequent irrigation several times a day until the seed has germinated, and then irrigate less frequently.

June Through August

Mowing

Mow to the desired height. Bermudagrass has a very wide range of acceptable heights ($\frac{5}{8}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches). Maintaining a lower height will require more frequent mowing to prevent scalping. Mowing heights below 1 inch will require a reel mower and very level ground; therefore, most bermudagrass lawns are maintained between 1 and $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

Fertilization

Apply 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet every four to six weeks using the March to May fertilization guidelines.

Watering

Follow guidelines for March through May.

Weed Control

Apply postemergence herbicides as needed for control of summer annual and perennial broadleaf weeds like white clover, knotweed, spurge, and lespedeza. Two or three total applications from seven to ten days apart are required to control crabgrass and goosegrass. Do not apply herbicides during a drought or when grass and weeds are not actively growing.

Thatch Removal

If thatch is thicker than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, remove it using a vertical mower. Thatch can be removed monthly if the lawn has sufficient time to recover.

Insect Control

Preventive treatments for white grubs can occur in June, when adults are flying and starting to lay eggs. Curative treatments for white grubs are applied after the larvae have hatched from the egg stage. The best time to apply curative treatments is when grubs are actively feeding near the soil surface, about 24 hours after significant rainfall. See the NC State Extension publication [White Grubs in Turf](#) for specific recommendations.

September Through November

Mowing

Continue mowing using the March to May guidelines until several weeks before the first expected frost. *In the piedmont:* If the lawn is not overseeded in the winter, raise the mowing height $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to provide more protection from winter kill. Raise the mowing height $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in early to mid-September in the mountains, about mid to late September in the piedmont, and late September to mid-October in the coastal plain.

Fertilization

To minimize spring dead spot, apply no more than $\frac{1}{2}$ pound N per 1,000 square feet in September, or four weeks before the first expected frost. Use a low N, high potassium fertilizer like 5-10-30, or supplement with 1 pound of potash (K_2O) per 1,000 square feet four to six weeks before expected frost using $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds of muriate of potash (KCl) (0-0-60) or 2 pounds of potassium sulfate (0-0-50). (The third number represents potassium.)

Insect Control

Curative applications applied in early fall may control some white grubs, but efficacy will vary depending on the size of grub. Later instars (larger grubs) are harder to treat than early instars. Identify and make note of problem areas for preventive applications in late spring to early summer.

Disease Control

If spring dead spot was a problem, apply an appropriate fungicide to problem areas at the highest label rates. Applications are most effective when soil temperatures are between 60 and 80°F. To move the fungicide into the root zone, apply with a large volume of water (5 gallons per 1,000 square feet) or water in with at least $\frac{1}{8}$ inch of irrigation immediately after application. Map areas for future target applications so that you will treat only the affected areas.

Watering

Although irrigation is not usually necessary, make sure the soil doesn't get powder-dry.

December Through February

Mowing

Mow to remove leaves and other debris. Leaf removal will enable earlier and more consistent spring green-up.

Fertilization

DO NOT fertilize at this time. Submit soil samples for analysis every two to three years to determine nutrient requirements. (Contact [your local North Carolina Cooperative Extension center](#) for details.) Depending on the results of your soil test, you may need to apply lime or sulfur to adjust soil pH.

Watering

Follow guidelines for September through November.

Weed Control

Apply broadleaf herbicides as necessary to control winter annual weeds like chickweed and henbit. Atrazine or simazine can be applied in November or December to control annual bluegrass and winter annual broadleaf weeds.

More About Bermudagrass

Bermudagrasses range from coarse to fine in leaf texture. They form a dense, durable surface with relatively low mowing heights. They tolerate drought well, require full sunlight, and grow well on all but poorly drained soils. Bermudagrass withstands wear and traffic, establishes quickly, and recovers rapidly from injury.

Bermudagrass can invade flowerbeds and other areas because they have stems that spread rapidly above and below the ground. Herbicides like Vantage, Fusilade II, or Roundup control bermudagrass, although maintaining a crisp straight edge with these chemicals is difficult.

Bermudagrass performs best when maintained at $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch using a reel mower; however, a good quality lawn may be achieved with a rotary mower with sharp blades set as low as possible without scalping. Bermudagrass should be maintained shorter than $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Uneven ground can make mowing difficult. Common bermudagrass, compared to hybrid bermudagrass (Tifway and TifTuf), can be seeded and maintained at higher mowing heights. Common bermudagrass provides less dense growth (so it may have more weeds), has a wider leaf blade, and produces more seed heads, but it requires less maintenance.

Most fine-textured turf-type bermudagrasses must be planted as sod, sprigs, or plugs, but the coarser-textured common bermudagrass may be planted using seed. Hybrid bermudagrass varieties have finer leaf texture, more dense growth, and have fewer seed heads than common bermudagrass; they are also pollen-free.

Because of their aggressive growth, bermudagrasses have few serious pest problems, but they are subject to sting-nematode damage on sandy soils. Nematode damage leads to shallow-rooted plants that do not respond to water or fertilizer. This results in thin (low shoot density) and/or weak (retarded growth) stands that are prone to weed invasion. If you suspect nematode problems, contact [your local Extension center](#) for advice.

Authors

Grady Miller

Professor and Extension Turfgrass Specialist Crop & Soil Sciences

Jim Kerns

Professor and Extension Turfgrass Pathology Specialist Entomology & Plant Pathology

Terri Billeisen

Extension Associate Entomology & Plant Pathology

Fred Yelverton

Professor and Extension Turf Weed Management Specialist Crop & Soil Sciences

Charles Peacock

Professor and Extension Turfgrass Specialist Crop & Soil Sciences

Rick Brandenburg

Professor and Extension Turfgrass Entomology Specialist Entomology & Plant Pathology

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