Centipedegrass Lawn Maintenance Calendar

NC STATE EXTENSION

Lawn Maintenance Calendars

Introduction

These suggested 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 the following management practices and dates to suit your particular lawn.

March Through May

Mowing

Mow grass to 1 to 2 inches tall. Do not let grass get taller than 2½ inches. NEVER burn off centipedegrass to remove excessive debris.

Fertilization

It is best to submit a soil sample to determine nutrient requirements. Contact your local Cooperative Extension center for details. Note that lime is rarely needed for centipedegrass. DO NOT apply nitrogen (N) before the end of May. Fertilize with 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet in mid-May for a basic fertilizer program. Yellow appearance may indicate an iron deficiency. Spray iron (ferrous) sulfate (2 ounces in 5 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet) or a chelated iron source to enhance color as needed. Follow label directions. Grass will green up within 24 hours.

Watering

Actively growing centipedegrass requires about 1 inch of water per week, either from rainfall or supplemental irrigation. Sandy soils often require more frequent watering (½ inch of water every third day) if rainfall is insufficient. Proper irrigation helps prevent or reduce problems later in the summer.

Weed Control

Apply preemergence herbicides to control crabgrass, goosegrass, and foxtail. It is generally best to apply by March 1. Apply postemergence herbicides in May if you need to control summer annual and perennial broadleaf weeds like knotweed, spurge, and lespedeza. Do not apply postemergence herbicides until three weeks after green-up. Centipedegrass is sensitive to certain herbicides (for example, 2,4-D), so follow label directions and use caution.

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. For more information about a variety of turf pests, see the NC State Extension publication *Insect Management in Turf*.

Thatch Removal

Power rake (vertical mow) to remove thatch (the layer of undecomposed grass) in late May if it is thicker than ½ inch. A 2- or 3-inch blade spacing that is set ¼ inch deep in one direction works best. A power rake with a 1-inch blade spacing may severely damage the lawn.

Renovation

Replant bare areas in May (or when daytime temperatures are continually above 60°F) using seed (¼ to ½ pound per 1,000 square feet) or sprigs (¾ bushel per 1,000 square feet). It's easier to spread seed if you mix it with 2 gallons of fine sand per 1,000 square feet to be covered. Seeds germinate in 28 days, but establishment is slow. To keep seedbed continually moist, lightly water several times a day for 28 days. It takes up to three years to establish a new centipedegrass lawn from seed.

June Through August

Mowing

Follow guidelines for March through May.

Fertilization

Apply 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet in mid-August if fertilization beyond a basic program is needed, particularly in the coastal plain region. It may be beneficial to use a high potassium fertilizer like 5-5-15 or 8-8-24 (the third number is percent potassium). Use a fertilizer without phosphorus (like 15-0-14, 8-0-24) if soil testing reveals existing moderate to high levels of phosphorus. Yellow appearance may indicate an iron deficiency. Follow guidelines for March through May to address iron deficiency.

> *You need to apply ½ pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, but how much fertilizer do you need to buy? Divide 50 by the FIRST number on the fertilizer bag. 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

Follow guidelines for March through May.

Weed Control

Apply postemergence herbicides as needed to control summer annual and perennial broadleaf weeds like knotweed, spurge, and lespedeza. Centipedegrass is sensitive to certain herbicides (2,4-D), so be careful and follow label directions. Do not apply herbicides unless grass and weeds are actively growing and lawn is not suffering from drought stress.

Insect Control

Preventive treatments for white grubs can be used 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 about 24 hours after significant rainfall, when grubs are actively feeding near the soil surface. See the NC State Extension publication *White Grubs in Turf* for specific recommendations.

If you suspect nematode damage, contact your local Cooperative Extension center about testing.

September Through November

Mowing

Continue mowing your lawn to 1 to 2 inches.

Fertilization

Four to six weeks before the first expected frost, apply 1 pound of potassium (K_2O) per 1,000 square feet using 1½ pounds of muriate of potash (0-0-60) or 2 pounds of potassium sulfate (0-0-50). DO NOT lime unless a soil test recommends lime.

> *You need to apply 1 pound of potash per 1,000 square feet, but how much fertilizer do you need to buy? Divide 100 by the THIRD number on the fertilizer bag. For example, if you've got a 6-6-12 fertilizer, divide 100 by 12 and you get 8.3. That means you need to buy 8.3 pounds of fertilizer for every 1,000 square feet of lawn.*

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 or early summer.

Watering

Follow guidelines for March through May until the lawn browns (becomes dormant). Beyond that time, water enough to keep soil from becoming powder-dry.

December Through February

Mowing

Mow to 1 to 2 inches to remove leaves and other debris. NEVER burn off centipedegrass to remove excessive debris.

Fertilization

DO NOT fertilize centipedegrass at this time. Apply lime or sulfur ONLY if the soil test recommends it.

Watering

Irrigation is rarely needed. Water occasionally during extended dry spells to prevent desiccation of crown tissue.

Weed Control

Apply broadleaf herbicides as necessary to control chickweed and henbit. Centipedegrass is sensitive to certain herbicides (2,4-D), so be careful and follow label directions exactly. A select few herbicides (including atrazine or simazine) can be safely applied in November or December to control annual bluegrass and several winter annual broadleaf weeds.

More About Centipedegrass

Centipedegrass is a slow-growing, apple-green, coarse-leafed turfgrass. It is a low-maintenance, general-purpose turf. It has the lowest N requirements of the commonly used turfgrasses, doesn't need frequent mowing, and grows well in full sun to moderate shade. It does not tolerate traffic, compaction, high-phosphorus soils, low-potassium soils, high pH, excessive thatch, drought, or heavy shade. It is more commonly grown in the region that is east of Interstate 95 in North Carolina.

Centipedegrass is susceptible to parasitic roundworms (a damaging type of nematode), ground pearls (an insect), and fairy ring (a disease). If you suspect one of these issues, consult the relevant pest factsheet at NC State Extension's TurfFiles. Proper lawn management practices will help prevent and control centipedegrass problems. If centipedegrass continues to die in a certain location, you may need to choose another species.

Some maintenance programs provided by professional lawn care service companies differ from recommendations given here and are equally effective.

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Publication date: Aug. 4, 2021
AG-381

This publication printed on: Sept. 27, 2021
URL of this page