

# Carolina Lawns

*A Guide to Maintaining  
Quality Turf in the Landscape*



**NC** State University  
A&T State University  
**COOPERATIVE  
EXTENSION**  
*Empowering People • Providing Solutions*



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**L**awns are smooth, living carpets that add beauty and recreational space to your home. The benefits of a healthy lawn go beyond the obvious. As your grass grows, it helps the environment by stabilizing soil and reducing air pollution, noise, heat, dust, and glare. Surveys show that an attractive, well-landscaped lawn can even add to the value of your home.

To reap the rewards of a handsome lawn, take great care in the selection, establishment, maintenance, and renovation of your lawn grass. By making the proper choices, you can create a durable lawn that will grow with minimal maintenance and pesticide use.



*Recommendations for the use of agricultural chemicals are included in this publication as a convenience to the reader. The use of brand names and any mention or listing of commercial products or services in this publication does not imply endorsement by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service nor discrimination against similar products or services not mentioned. Individuals who use agricultural chemicals are responsible for ensuring that the intended use complies with current regulations and conforms to the product label. Be sure to obtain current information about usage regulations and examine a current product label before applying any chemical. For assistance, contact your county Cooperative Extension agent.*

*Professional lawn care companies may use a maintenance schedule that differs from what is described in this publication, and it may be equally effective.*

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## What To Plant

Whether you are establishing a new lawn or renovating an existing one, deciding which type of grass to plant will be the first step. No one type of grass is best suited to all situations. A number of factors should be considered before deciding which lawn grass to plant. Your decision should be based on region, climate, intended use or wear at the site, and desired appearance.

Find your region in the map in Figure 1. Both cool-season (northern) and warm-season (southern) grasses are grown in North Carolina (Table 1, page 5). Cool-season grasses grow best in the spring and fall and less actively in the summer. They stay reasonably green in the winter. Tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, fine fescue, and perennial ryegrass are common types of cool-season grasses. Table 3 (page 9) rates the performance of various cultivars of these grasses in North Carolina. Warm-season grasses are slow to green up in the spring, grow best in the summer, and go dormant after the first heavy frost. Table 4 (page 10) lists many warm-season cultivars.

Also consider the characteristics of each site and your goals to determine which types of grass are appropriate. Choose the grass that best meets your preference for color, density, and texture. Choose a tough, aggressive, wear-tolerant grass where heavy traffic is expected. And consider the amount of time, effort, and money you are willing to spend for turf-grass maintenance.

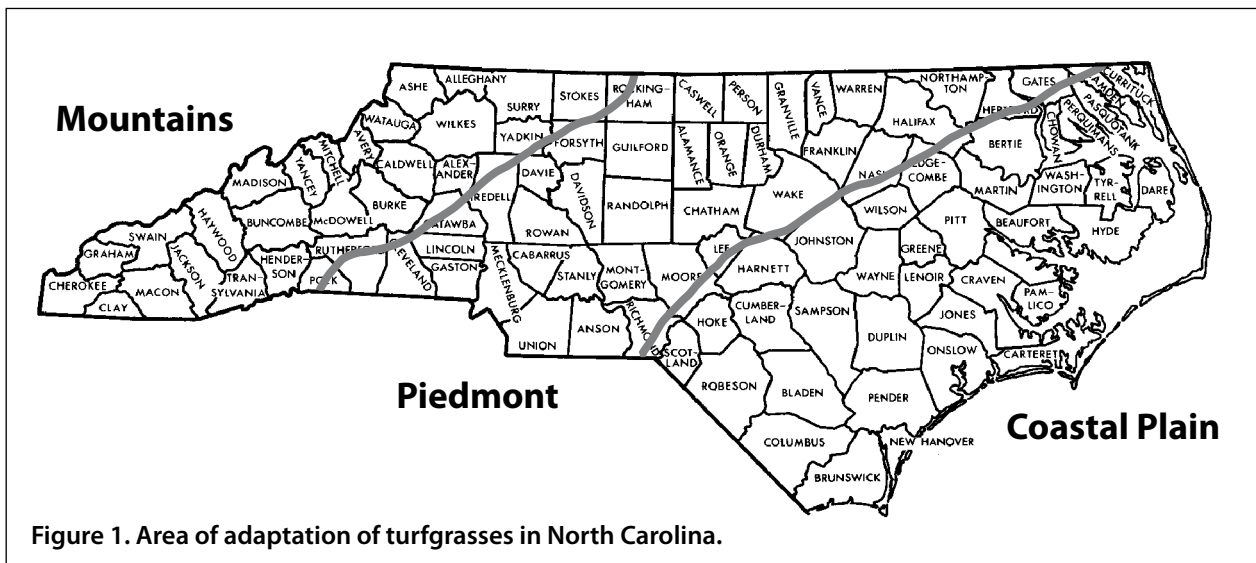
### Cool-season Grasses

Tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and fine fescues—such as creeping red, chewings, and hard—are cool-season perennial grasses used for lawns, mostly in the mountain and piedmont regions of North Carolina. Unlike warm-season grasses, cool-

season grasses remain green throughout most of the winter. They are better adapted to the mountains and piedmont. These grasses perform best in spring and fall and have a tendency to show signs of stress in the summer. This is especially true as you move toward the coastal plain. Cool-season grasses are best seeded in early fall, but fair results may be obtained from seeding in early spring (mid-February to late March in the piedmont). Generally, late winter or spring seeding of these grasses is not recommended.

**Tall fescue** is best adapted to the mountains and piedmont but can be successfully maintained on the heavy silt loams in the coastal plain. It is a reliable performer and easily started from seed. It is the best grass to plant if you want a year-round green lawn. Tall fescue thrives in sun or medium shade. It will not perform well in full sun in the coastal plain, especially if the soil is sandy. It can be seeded by itself or mixed with Kentucky bluegrass, fine fescue, or both, particularly where shade is a concern. Tall fescue is a bunch-type grass, so damaged or bare areas will need to be re-seeded. It exhibits good disease resistance, drought tolerance, and cold tolerance; tolerates moderate traffic; and persists with minimum care. Several improved tall fescue cultivars have been developed that are more shade tolerant, denser, and finer textured than Kentucky 31, a commonly used older cultivar. These characteristics become more evident as the turf matures and the maintenance level increases. Research has shown that some of these improved cultivars also have darker green color, improved disease tolerance, lower growth habit, better wear tolerance, and drought tolerance.

Experts recommend that a blend of two or three cultivars be planted rather than seeding just a single cultivar. This broadens the genetic base and gives the turf a better chance of withstanding a variety of



challenges. Use a seeding rate of 6 pounds per 1,000 square feet (sq ft). Don't assume more is better. Higher seeding rates can result in weak, thin stands that are more susceptible to disease and high temperature stress.

The tall fescues perform best when mowed at a height of 3 inches, and should never be mowed shorter than 2.5 inches. Tall fescue may turn brown, yet can often survive short periods of drought. Under certain circumstances, some tall fescue may be lost if a drought exceeds three weeks. To maintain a green lawn, it is best to irrigate, if possible, during periods of drought.

**Kentucky bluegrass** produces a high-quality, medium- to fine-textured turf, at least when grown in the right climate. In North Carolina, it is well suited for the mountains and can be grown in combination with tall fescue in the piedmont. It is not suitable for use in the coastal plain. Kentucky bluegrass prefers fertile, limed, well-drained soils in sun or light shade. Excellent sod results from rhizomes (underground stems) that spread, with most cultivars recuperating from and tolerating pest control measures and moderate levels of traffic. Many new cultivars with improved color, texture, and pest resistance are now commercially available.

As with most cool-season grasses, it is best to broaden the genetic base by planting a blend of two to three cultivars rather than seeding a single cultivar. It

is also common for Kentucky bluegrass to be seeded in combination with tall fescue. The tall fescue enhances drought and heat tolerance, whereas the Kentucky bluegrass provides finer texture and greater recuperative potential. Generally, Kentucky bluegrass grows better than tall fescue in moderate shade. When mixed with tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass tends to dominate where the soil is limed and the turf is adequately fertilized and mowed fairly short.

Kentucky bluegrass should be mowed at a height of 1.5 to 2.5 inches when planted alone. It should be mowed at 2.5 inches or higher when mixed with tall fescue. Seeding rates range from 1 to 2 pounds per 1,000 sq ft. Higher rates can result in weak, thin stands that are more susceptible to disease and high temperature stress.

Even though Kentucky bluegrass may turn brown during a two- to four-week summer drought, it is not necessary to irrigate. Kentucky bluegrass recovers well from most droughts, and watering will often increase disease problems.

**Fine fescues** include creeping red, chewings, and hard fescue. The name is derived from the very finely textured leaves, which are almost as fine as pine needles. Noted for tolerance to shade, drought, and poor soil conditions compared to other cool-season grasses, fine fescues are often included with tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass when planted in the shade or subject to low

**Table 1. Responses to Soil Temperature for Cool- and Warm-season Grasses**

Event	Temperature at Which Event Occurs	
	Cool-season Grasses	Warm-season Grasses
Shoot growth ceases due to heat	90°F	120°F
Root growth ceases due to heat	77°F	110°F
Maximum temperature for root growth of any consequence	70°F	N/A
Optimum shoot growth	60 – 75°F	80 – 90°F
Optimum root growth	50 – 65°F	75 – 85°F
Expected spring root decline triggered	N/A	64°F Roots turn brown and die within 1 or 2 days. This decline occurs only if a very cold winter is followed by a rapid spring warm-up.
Shoot growth ceases due to cold	40°F	N/A
Root growth ceases due to cold	33°F	50°F Root growth begins to slow below this temperature. Chilling injury resulting in discoloration is possible. Initiation of dormancy results in discoloration.
Low temperature kill possible	If temperature drops rapidly below 20°F	25°F

maintenance. They are best adapted to the mountains but can be grown in the piedmont. They should not be used in the coastal plain. They may not persist in sunny locations exposed to high temperature extremes, excessive soil moisture or humidity, or heavy traffic.

Fine fescue seed should be mixed with Kentucky bluegrass because most of the fine fescues are bunch type and do not have the ability to spread. New seedlings establish quickly due to excellent seedling vigor. Seed fine fescue at 1.5 pounds per 1,000 sq ft when mixed with either tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass.

Fine fescue should be mowed at 1.5 to 2.5 inches when mixed with Kentucky bluegrass but at 2.5 inches or higher when mixed with tall fescue.

**Perennial ryegrass** is similar in appearance to Kentucky bluegrass, but is only adapted to the mountains. In North Carolina it is never seeded alone but always mixed with Kentucky bluegrass. These grasses complement each other because perennial ryegrass establishes faster than Kentucky bluegrass, and Kentucky bluegrass has the ability to spread and fill in damaged areas.

A mix of Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass should be seeded at the rate of 2.5 pounds per 1,000 sq ft, with Kentucky bluegrass making up 60 percent of the mix by weight.

Perennial ryegrass should be mowed at 1.5 to 2.5 inches when mixed with Kentucky bluegrass.

**Annual ryegrass** is used only when a temporary turf cover is needed. It is *never* recommended for permanent lawn mixtures because it dies in late spring, when temperatures approach 80°F or higher. It is sometimes found in inexpensive commercial seed mixtures but should be avoided. Because annual ryegrass is an annual, it must be re-seeded each fall. Annual ryegrass has been used by some homeowners to provide winter color for bermudagrass lawns. It is never recommended for overseeding other warm-season grasses.

### Warm-season Grasses

Bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, centipedegrass, St. Augustinegrass, carpetgrass, and bahiagrass are classified as warm-season perennial grasses. All except bahiagrass are mostly recommended for lawns in the piedmont and coastal plain of North Carolina. They grow best in the summer, go dormant in the fall at the first heavy frost, turn brown, and then green up slowly the following spring. For this reason, they usually perform better the farther east and south you go in those regions. Warm-season grasses are best planted in late spring and early summer. Unlike cool-season grasses, some warm-season grasses must be planted either by

sod or other vegetative means because seeds either are not available or do not result in uniform stands. Warm-season grasses are usually seeded or planted as a single variety (monoculture) rather than in blends and mixtures.

**Bermudagrass** spreads by stolons and rhizomes, and it can invade flowerbeds and other areas because it has runners that spread rapidly both above and below ground. But bermudagrass is extremely drought tolerant, grows rapidly on any type of soil except where drainage is poor, and makes a good turf if fertilized and mowed low and often. Cultivar texture ranges from coarse to fine, and it forms a dense, durable surface when grown in full sunlight. The majority of cultivars will not tolerate shade. Bermudagrass is well adapted to sandy soils. Bermudagrass establishes quickly, withstands wear and traffic, and recovers rapidly from injury.

Most finely textured, high-quality turf-type bermudagrasses are planted using sod, sprigs, or plugs. Common bermudagrass, which is the most coarsely textured, can be seeded. Several newer cultivars, however, can also be seeded that have a medium texture. Bermudagrass should be seeded at 1 to 2 pounds per 1,000 sq ft.

Bermudagrass lawns perform best when mowed at 0.75 to 1 inch using a reel mower. However, good performance can be achieved with a rotary mower with sharp blades set as low as possible without scalping. Uneven ground can make mowing below 1 inch difficult. For this reason, a 1- to 2-inch mowing height is recommended when using a rotary mower. For best results, bermudagrass should be mowed often (at least twice per week), especially at the lower mowing heights.

**Zoysiagrass** spreads by stolons and rhizomes, but it is easier to keep out of flowerbeds than bermudagrass. Zoysiagrass produces a very dense, wear-tolerant lawn that grows well in full sun and light shade. It has stiff leaves that produce a very dense turf, which people often describe as feeling like “walking on a cushion.” Zoysiagrass grows more slowly than bermudagrass, and thus requires less frequent mowing. But because the leaves are stiff, mowing can be difficult unless the mower blades are sharp. The finer-textured zoysiagrasses ideally should be mowed with a reel mower, whereas the coarser-textured zoysiagrasses can be mowed with a rotary mower. Zoysiagrass is very drought resistant. It rarely needs irrigation to survive in North Carolina.

Zoysiagrass cultivars were once limited to two cultivars: Meyer and the finer textured Emerald. These cultivars must be planted vegetatively, and are low-

and slow-growing. They are very slow to establish from plugs, often taking three years for total coverage when planted on 12-inch centers. These older cultivars can become thatchy—puffy due to an accumulation of dead, dying, decaying plant residue at the soil surface. This is especially so when these grasses are mowed high and infrequently or heavily fertilized. Thatch may need to be removed every two to three years, but care should be taken because the recovery rate of these cultivars is very slow.

In the last 20 years, a number of zoysiagrass cultivars have been released. These cultivars, such as El Toro, Crowne, Palisades, Empire, and Jamur, are coarser in texture (similar to newer tall fescues) and are quicker to establish and recover from injury. They are not as cold tolerant as Meyer and should not be mowed as short as Emerald and Meyer. Cavalier, Zeon, and Zorro are new zoysiagrass cultivars with a moderate growth rate and a fine texture similar to Emerald. Cold tolerance of zoysia is not a problem in North Carolina's piedmont and coastal plain.

A few cultivars of zoysiagrass, such as Compadre, Zenith, Zen 100, and Zen 300CS, can be seeded. These coarse-textured zoysiagrasses are typically mowed with a rotary mower.

**Centipede** spreads by stolons. Centipede is a slow growing, apple-green, coarsely leaved turfgrass that is best used as a low maintenance, general purpose turf. It requires little fertilizer once established (0.5 to 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft per year) and infrequent mowing, and it grows well on acidic soils in full sun to partial shade. It does not tolerate traffic, compaction, high soil pH, high soil phosphorus, excessive thatch, drought, or heavy shade.

Centipede is slow to establish and may take two to three years when seeded. It should be mowed when it attains 1 inch in height and no higher than 1.5 inches. Centipede can become thatchy, especially when mowed high and infrequently or when heavily fertilized. Thatch may need to be removed every two to three years, but care should be taken because the stems can easily be torn from the ground, leaving bare spots.

TifBlair, an improved cultivar from the University of Georgia, is quicker to establish and more cold tolerant than common centipede. It also retains its green color later in the fall.

**St. Augustine** spreads by stolons. St. Augustine is a fast-growing turfgrass best adapted to the coastal plain. It has a medium- to dark-green color and very coarsely textured leaves. With proper maintenance, it will provide a dense, lush lawn. St.

Augustine is very shade and salt tolerant but is considered the least cold tolerant lawn grass. The cultivar Raleigh has the best cold tolerance and is well adapted for the eastern side of the piedmont and the western side of the coastal plain.

Seed is unavailable, so cultivars must be vegetatively planted. St. Augustine grows best in fertile, well-drained soils.

Because St. Augustine is fast growing, it needs to be mowed frequently at 2.5 to 4 inches during the growing season using a rotary mower. It should never receive more than 4 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft annually. At high rates of fertilization and irrigation, thatch buildup may become a problem. St. Augustine is not tolerant of heavy traffic, compaction, or cold weather.

**Carpet** spreads by stolons. Carpet is a slow- and low-growing, medium-green, coarsely textured lawngrass. It produces a low maintenance, general purpose turf. Carpet resembles St. Augustine and centipede and is often mistaken for centipede but has broader leaves. It grows well in full sun to moderate shade and performs well in wet, shaded, acid soils where other lawngrasses may not grow. It grows best in full sunlight when daytime temperatures are between 60 and 90°F, and does not tolerate cold, drought, salt, or traffic. Carpet requires only 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft annually, and needs to be mowed only infrequently at 1.5 inches.

**Bahia** spreads by stolons and rhizomes. Bahia is never recommended as a lawn grass because of its open canopy, unsightly seedheads, and difficulty in mowing. It is best used on roadsides where appearance is not a concern and low maintenance is the rule.

A comparative chart of principal lawn grasses used in each region is provided in Table 2 (page 8). Study the chart to help select the appropriate grass for the site and the intended use of the lawn. This information is based on cultivar (variety) trials and observations by turfgrass researchers at North Carolina State University.

The NC State TurfFiles Turf Select Decision Aid program (<http://www.TurfFiles.ncsu.edu/turfselect/>) is a free online tool designed to guide homeowners through the turf selection process. Cultivar performance recommendations are based on overall quality ratings for each of these commercially available varieties. The National Turf Evaluation Program (NTEP) trial research results have been consolidated into an easy-to-use question-and-answer program that provides proven grass types and cultivars suitable for your region and use.

**Table 2. Characteristics of Principal Lawn Grasses Grown in North Carolina**

Lawn grass	Can Be Seeded?	Tolerance Ratings				Appearance		Preferred Season	Rate of Establishment*	Maintenance		
		Shade	Heat	Cold	Drought	Wear	Color			Texture	Cutting Height (in.)	Fertilizer (lb N/1,000 sq ft/yr)
<b>MOUNTAINS</b>												
Kentucky bluegrass	Yes	4	3	5	4	4	Med-dark	Medium	Moderate	1.5 – 2.5	2 – 3	Medium
Kentucky bluegrass/fine fescue mix	Yes	4	3	5	4	3	Med-dark	Fine-med	Moderate	1.5 – 2.5	2 – 3	Medium
Kentucky bluegrass/tall fescue mix	Yes	4	4	5	5	5	Med-dark	Med-coarse	Fast	2.5 – 3.5	2 – 3	High
Kentucky bluegrass/tall fescue/ fine fescue mix	Yes	5	4	5	5	5	Med-dark	Med-coarse	Fast	2.5 – 3.5	2 – 3	High
Kentucky bluegrass/ perennial ryegrass mix	Yes	4	3	5	4	5	Med-dark	Medium	Fast	2 – 3	2.5 – 3.5	Med-high
Tall fescue	Yes	4	4	5	5	5	Medium	Med-coarse	Fast	2.5 – 3.5	2.5 – 3.5	High
<b>PIEDMONT</b>												
Bermudagrass (common)	Yes	1	5	1	6	6	Medium	Medium	Fast	0.75 – 2	4 – 4.5	Med-high
Bermudagrass (hybrid)	No	1	5	2	6	6	Light-dark	Fine	Moderate	0.75 – 2	3 – 6	High
Bahiagrass	Yes	4	4	2	6	4	Med-dark	Coarse	Moderate	2 – 4	1	High
Centipedegrass	Yes	4	4	2	4	1	Light	Coarse	Slow	1 – 1.5	1 – 2	Low
Kentucky bluegrass/tall fescue mix	Yes	4	4	5	5	5	Med-dark	Med-coarse	Fast	2.5 – 3.5	2 – 4	High
Kentucky bluegrass/tall fescue/ fine fescue mix	Yes	5	4	5	5	5	Med-dark	Med-coarse	Fast	2.5 – 3.5	2 – 4	High
St. Augustinegrass	No	5	5	2	4	1	Med-dark	Coarse	Moderate	2.5 – 4	2 – 3	Med-high
Tall fescue	Yes	4	4	5	5	5	Medium	Coarse	Fast	2.5 – 3.5	2 – 4	High
Zoysiagrass	Yes	4	5	4	6	4	Med-dark	Fine-med	Very slow	0.75 – 2	1 – 3	Low-med
<b>COASTAL PLAIN</b>												
Bermudagrass (common)	Yes	1	5	1	6	6	Medium	Medium	Fast	0.75 – 2	3 – 4.5	Med-high
Bermudagrass (hybrid)	No	1	5	2	6	6	Light-dark	Fine	Moderate	0.75 – 2	3 – 6	Very high
Bahiagrass	Yes	4	5	2	6	4	Med-dark	Coarse	Moderate	2 – 4	1	High
Centipedegrass	Yes	4	4	2	4	2	Light	Coarse	Slow	1 – 1.5	1 – 2	Low
St. Augustinegrass	No	5	5	2	4	2	Med-dark	Coarse	Moderate	2.5 – 4	2 – 4	Med-high
Tall fescue	Yes	4	4	5	5	5	Medium	Coarse	Fast	2.5 – 3.5	2 – 4	High
Zoysiagrass	Yes	4	5	4	6	4	Med-dark	Fine-med	Very slow	0.75 – 2	1 – 3	Low-med

Key for tolerance ratings: 6—Excellent 5—Very good 4—Good 3—Fair 2—Poor 1—Very poor Abbreviations: Med—Medium, Spr—Spring, Sum—Summer  
 Note: Some improved cultivars are better adapted and more pleasing in appearance than the comparison rating provided for a given lawn grass. Check with your county Cooperative Extension center concerning specific cultivars that have characteristics of interest to you. See Table 5 for suggested months of establishment.  
 \*Establishment rate is dictated by planting dates, seeding and planting rate, intensity of culture, and environment.  
 \*\* Mowing frequency is dictated by season, intensity of management, and use.



**Table 3. Cool-season Grass Cultivars with Excellent Performance in North Carolina**

Grass Type	Cultivar Name				
<b>Tall fescue</b>	2nd Millenium	Dominion	Hunter	Olympic Gold	Scorpion
	Avenger	Dynasty	Inferno	Padre	Serengeti
	Barlexas	Endeavor	Jaguar 3	Picasso	Signia
	Barlexas II	Escalade	Justice	Plantation	Silverstar
	Barrera	Falcon II	Kalahari	Proseeds 5301	Southern Choice II
	Barrington	Falcon IV	Kitty Hawk 2000	Prospect	Stetson
	Biltmore	Fidelity	Legitimate	Pure Gold	Tarheel
	Bingo	Finesse II	Lexington	Quest	Titan Ltd
	Bonsai	Fireaza	Magellan	Rebel Exeda	Titanium
	Bravo	Firebird	Masterpiece	Rebel Sentry	Tracer
	Cayenne	Focus	Matador	Rebel IV	Ultimate
	Constitution	Grande II	Millennium	Regiment II	Watchdog
	Coyote	Greenkeeper	Millennium SRP	Rembrandt	Wolfpack
	Davinci	Greystone	Mustang	Rhambler	
	Desire		Mustang 3	Rendition	
	<b>Kentucky bluegrass</b>	Alpine	Blackstone	Eagleton	Langara
Apollo		Blueberry	Envicta	Liberator	Rita
Arcadia*		Bodacious	Everest	Limousine	Royce
Arrow		Boomerang	Everglade	Midnight	Rugby
Award		Bordeaux	Excursion	Moonlight	Showcase
Awesome		Boutique	Freedom II	Nuglade	Sonoma
Bariras		Brilliant	Hallmark	Odyssey	Skye
Baronie		Cabernet	Impact	Prosperity	Total Eclipse
Bedazzled		Champagne	Jefferson	Quantum Leap	Unique
Bewitched		Champlain	Jewel		Washington
Beyond		Chicago			
<b>Fine fescue</b>		Ambassador	DP	Jasper II	Quatro
	Berkshire	Edgewood*	Musica*	Razor*	Spartan II
	Cardinal	Firefly	Oxford	Reliant IV*	Seabreeze
	Class One	Fortitude	Pathfinder		Zodiac
	Compass*	Garnet	Predator*		
		Gotham			
<b>Perennial ryegrass</b>	Accent II	Fiesta 4	Line Drive GLS	Paragon GLR	Quicksilver
	Allstar 3	Fiji	Majesty II	Pentium	Repell GLS
	Apple GL	Goalkeeper II	Manhattan 5 GLR	Phenom	Revenge GLX
	Brighstar SLT	Grand Slam 2	Monterey 3	Pianist	Secretariat II
	Caddieshack II	Harrier	Nexus	Pinnacle II	Silver Dollar
	Charismatic II	Headstart 2	Palace	Pizzazz	Transformer
	Citation Fore	Homerun	Palmer III	Premier	Top Gun II
	Dart	Inspire	Palmer IV	Primary	Zoom
	DCM	Keystone II	Panther GLS		
	Derby Extreme				

A rating of *excellent* means that the cultivar was not significantly different from the top performing cultivar regarding overall quality.

\*These cultivars have not been tested in North Carolina but have performed well in surrounding states.

**Table 4. Performance of Warm-season Grass Cultivars in North Carolina**

Grass Type	Cultivar	Comments
Bermudagrass, seeded cultivars	Arizona Common Mohawk Numex Sahara Savannah Southern Star Sunbird Sundevil II Sunstar Transcontinental Yukon Riviera Princess 77	<p>These cultivars are available as seed and will produce acceptable quality under proper management. They closely resemble common bermudagrass in its coarse texture and light-green color.</p> <p><b>Transcontinental, Yukon, Riviera, and Princess</b> are finer textured and denser than other seeded cultivars.</p> <p><b>Riviera and Yukon</b> are noted for cold tolerance and are more likely to survive in the western and northern parts of the state.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Seeded cultivars are grasses that do produce viable seed, which can be harvested and sold for use.</p>
Bermudagrass, vegetative cultivars	Aussie Green Celebration GN-1 Patriot Tifsport Tifton 10 Tifway	<p>These cultivars produce excellent quality grass under proper management. They possess dark-green color, fine leaf texture, and dense growth habits. They are typically considered as high maintenance grasses and must be mowed with a reel mower at a height of 0.5 to 1 inch to achieve high quality. These grasses are primarily suited for use on golf courses as well as high-end athletic fields and home lawns.</p> <p><b>Tifsport</b> performs best at 1 to 2 inches.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Vegetative cultivars are only available as sprigs, plugs, or sod. This is because they are either sterile grasses that do not produce viable seed, or they may produce seed that does not retain characteristics true to the cultivar. Vegetative cultivars must be purchased from a sod farm that carries the variety.</p>
Centipedegrass	Common Tifblair	<b>Tifblair</b> is an improved cultivar that exhibits better cold tolerance compared to <b>Common</b> .
St. Augustinegrass	Common Raleigh	<b>Raleigh</b> is noted for its improved cold tolerance compared to <b>Common</b> St. Augustinegrass.
Zoysiagrass, coarsely textured varieties	Compadre Crowne El Toro Empire Jamur Meyer Palisades Zenith	Seed is available for <b>Compadre</b> and <b>Zenith</b> .
Zoysiagrass, finely textured varieties	Cavalier Diamond Emerald Zeon Zorro	

Because the release and evaluation of turfgrass cultivars changes rapidly, you are encouraged to contact the Cooperative Extension center in your county for the latest information on grass characteristics and selection (<http://www.NCSU TurfFiles.ncsu.edu/turfSelect/>).

## Establishing a New Lawn

Establishing a healthy, attractive lawn means planting the best grass for your site at the right time and in a careful manner. Grass can be seeded or established using vegetation in the form of sprigs, plugs, or sod. The type of grass and the planting method you select will determine the best time of year to plant. Site and soil preparation, including fertilization, are especially important.

### Site Preparation

Preparing the site involves removing weeds and debris, planning for drainage, and grading the site.

1. Control perennial weeds with a nonselective herbicide. Hard-to-control weeds may require the services of a professional.
2. Remove debris. Insist that the builder **not** use the site as a dumping ground for paint, concrete, and other materials.
3. Plan for easy maintenance and a pleasing appearance. Avoid terraces, steep grades, poorly drained areas, and heavily shaded spots.
4. Install tile drain in poorly drained areas. Get professional advice about the type of drain and installation.
5. Remove the topsoil (usually 4 to 8 inches) and stockpile it nearby if grading is needed. (If bringing topsoil from other sites, be cautious. It may contain hard-to-control weeds or weed seeds.)
6. Build protective walls to save trees if the final grade is to be appreciably higher than the present level.
7. Shape the underlying subsoil to the desired contour, and redistribute topsoil uniformly above the subsoil. A 2 to 3 percent slope is needed for proper drainage away from buildings. Make certain the soil is firmed after shaping. There should be no visible footprints after walking on it.
8. Water the area to enhance settling. Fill areas that settle unevenly to avoid standing water.
9. If possible, mix 1 to 2 cubic yards of peat moss or compost per 1,000 sq ft into the top 6 to 8 inches of subsoil if planting in heavy clay or very sandy soils. Clay soils are prone to compaction and require frequent aeration (removal of soil cores).

### Soil Preparation

Well-prepared soil with adequate nutrients for growing grass encourages the development of a healthy lawn.

1. Take soil samples from the front yard and the backyard to determine soil pH and nutrient requirements. A single soil test may be all that is necessary if there are no obvious differences in soil texture, terrain, or troubled areas of the front yard and backyard. If the soils seem different, collect soil samples to a depth of 3 to 4 inches from several (10 to 15) locations and mix them together to produce a composite sample. Send approximately 1 cup of the air-dried soil sample to the NCDA & CS Agronomic Division Soil Testing Services, 1040 Mail Service Center, Raleigh NC 27607. Boxes and forms can be obtained at your county Cooperative Extension center or at the Agronomic Division office in Raleigh. Allow several weeks for the results to be returned.
2. Based on the soil test report recommendations or the fertilization guidelines presented below, incorporate lime and fertilizer into the top 6 to 8 inches of the soil using a disk or rototiller. Regardless of the region, a deeper root system is able to extract more moisture and nutrients from the soil, improving drought tolerance and overall health of the plant.
3. Rake or harrow the site to establish a smooth and level final grade. Soil particles should be no larger than marble size, and pea gravel size is even better. Hand raking is the best way to level the soil and work out hills and hollows. Allow time for rain or irrigation to settle the soil, and roll or cultipack lightly to firm the soil before planting seed, sprigs, plugs, or sod. Hand rake again to break up the crusty surface before planting.



Figure 2. Give the grass a good start with a properly prepared seedbed.

## Fertilization

As recommended above, it's best to submit a soil sample for testing when establishing a new lawn to determine how much lime and fertilizer should be added to your soil. This is especially important if you are planting centipedegrass. It prefers acidic soils and low levels of phosphorus and may not require the addition of lime and phosphorus.

**Fertilize before planting.** Apply fertilizer and lime when the soil is prepared based on these guidelines:

*If you obtained a soil test:* Apply the amount of lime and fertilizer recommended for your soil by the soil testing laboratory. For additional information about interpreting a soil test, visit this Web site: <http://www.ncagr.com/agronomi/uyrst.htm>

*If you did not obtain a soil test:* Follow these recommendations for all grasses except centipedegrass.

1. Apply 75 pounds of ground limestone per 1,000 sq ft.
2. Apply a starter type fertilizer (one that is high in phosphorus) based on the type of grass and the planting method. Fertilizer bags have a three-number system indicating the primary nutrients, such as 8-8-8 or 5-10-10. These numbers denote the N-P-K ratio—the percentage of each nutrient in a fertilizer. The percentages are always noted in the following order:

- N Nitrogen for green color and growth.
- P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> Phosphorus for good establishment and rooting.
- K<sub>2</sub>O Potassium to enhance pest and environmental stress tolerance.

Some common examples of starter type fertilizers required for a 1,000 sq ft area include 40 pounds of 5-10-10, 20 pounds of 10-20-20, or 16 pounds of 18-24-6. For sandy soils, typical to the coastal plain and sandhills of North Carolina, fertilizer rates should be increased by 20 percent.

**Fertilize after planting.** Apply fertilizers uniformly and with care using a centrifugal (rotary) or drop-type spreader. Apply half the fertilizer in one direction and the other half moving at right angles to the first pass to ensure thorough and uniform coverage (See Figure 3).

*For seeded lawns:* Fertilize the new seedlings approximately six to eight weeks after emergence. For more specific maintenance information on your grass type, refer to the NC State TurfFiles Maintenance Calendars at the Web sites listed under “For More Information” at the end of this publication. Use a complete N-P-K turf-grade fertilizer that provides about 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft or the amount recommended on your soil test. The fertilizer should have a 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 analysis (for example, 12-4-8 or 16-4-8), and one-fourth to one-half of the nitrogen should be a slow-release form.

*For vegetatively planted warm-season grasses:* Fertilize throughout the first growing season to encourage faster spread. Every three to four weeks during the growing season, add 0.5 to 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft until the plants have completely covered the desired lawn area.

*To help reduce turf loss:* Avoid high nitrogen fertilization of cool-season grasses in the late spring or summer and of warm-season grasses in the fall or winter. If higher nitrogen fertilization is applied, there may be a greater occurrence of diseases.

## When to Plant

### Cool-season grasses

*Seeding:* Cool-season grasses are best seeded from mid-August to mid-September, depending on location (see Table 5, page 13). Seeding beyond these dates increases the chance of failure caused by winter injury. Spring or late-winter seedlings are often less than satisfactory because the seedling roots do not have time to become well established before the heat and drought of summer. If seeding of a cool-season grass is not

### How to Determine Fertilizer Requirements

*To apply 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft:*

Divide 100 by the first number on the fertilizer bag to determine the amount of product to be used per 1,000 sq ft.

**Example:** A 16-4-8 fertilizer. 100 divided by 16 equals 6.25. Therefore, 6.25 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet will deliver 1 pound of nitrogen.

*To apply 0.5 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft:*

50 divided by the first number on the fertilizer bag equals the amount of product to be used per 1,000 sq ft.

**Example:** A 10-10-10 fertilizer. 50 divided by 10 equals 5. Therefore, 5 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 sq ft will deliver 0.5 pound of nitrogen.

accomplished in the fall, your best alternative date for the piedmont is mid-February to early March. Coastal plain areas would be seeded two weeks earlier, whereas the mountain areas would be seeded two weeks later.

If you plan to seed a cool-season grass in the fall, such as tall fescue or Kentucky bluegrass, and your lawn site is ready for seeding in late March, April, May, or June, you can obtain a temporary cover by seeding

annual ryegrass. Fertilize with 75 pounds of ground limestone and 15 pounds of a 0-10-20 fertilizer per 1,000 sq ft. Another alternative is to seed annual ryegrass at 1.5 to 2 pounds per 1,000 sq ft, fertilized with 15 to 20 pounds of 10-10-10 fertilizer per 1,000 sq ft. Instead of following the above suggestions, you may wish to seed the desired cool-season grass. This procedure may succeed in some years, but in any event

**Table 5. Planting Dates and Rates for Cool- and Warm-season Grasses in North Carolina**

Lawn Grass	Optimum Planting Date*	Planting Rate per 1,000 Square Feet		
		Seed (pounds)	Sprigs for Space Planting (bushels)	Sprigs for Broadcast (bushels)
<b>MOUNTAINS</b>				
Kentucky bluegrass	Aug. 15 to Sept. 1	1.5 to 2	–	–
Kentucky bluegrass/ fine fescue mix	Aug. 15 to Sept. 1	1.5 + 1.5	–	–
Kentucky bluegrass/ tall fescue mix	Aug. 15 to Sept. 1	1 + 5	–	–
Kentucky bluegrass/tall fescue/ fine fescue mix	Aug. 15 to Sept. 1	1 + 5 + 1	–	–
Kentucky bluegrass/ perennial ryegrass mix	Aug. 15 to Sept. 1	1.5 + 1	–	–
Tall fescue	Aug. 15 to Sept. 1	6	–	–
<b>PIEDMONT</b>				
Bermudagrass	April to July <sup>a</sup>	1 to 2	0.75	3 to 10
Bermudagrass (hybrid)	April to July	–	0.75	3 to 10
Bahiagrass	March to June	5	–	–
Centipedegrass	March to July	0.25 to 0.50	1 to 2 <sup>c</sup>	–
Kentucky bluegrass/ tall fescue mix	Sept. 1 to Sept. 15	1 + 5	–	–
Kentucky bluegrass/ tall fescue/ fine fescue mix	Aug. 1 to Sept. 1	1 + 5 + 1	–	–
St. Augustinegrass	April to July	–	1.0	1
Tall fescue	Sept. 1 to Sept. 15	6	–	–
Zoysiagrass	April to July <sup>a</sup>	1 to 2	1 to 2 <sup>c</sup>	3 to 10
<b>COASTAL PLAIN</b>				
Bermudagrass	April to July	1 to 2	0.75	3 to 10
Bermudagrass (hybrid)	March to July <sup>a</sup>	–	0.75	3 to 10
Bahaiagrass	March to June	5	–	–
Centipedegrass	March to July	0.25 to 0.50	1 to 2 <sup>c</sup>	–
St. Augustinegrass	April to July	–	–	–
Tall fescue	Sept. 15 to Oct. 15	6	–	–
Zoysiagrass	March to July <sup>a</sup>	1 to 2	1 to 2 <sup>c</sup>	3 to 10

\*Seeding beyond these dates increases the chance of failure. Sod consisting of cool-season grasses can be installed any time the ground is not frozen. Warm-season grasses can be installed as long as soil temperature exceeds 55°F.

<sup>a</sup> For best results, choose earlier dates when using vegetative material.

<sup>b</sup> 1 square yard of turf pulled apart is equivalent to 1 bushel of sprigs.

<sup>c</sup> Often plugged using 3 square yards of turf cut into 2-inch squares on 12-inch centers to plant 1,000 sq ft

will give you ground cover until fall, even if all of the grass dies.

*Sodding:* You may successfully install a cool-season grass sod anytime in the cooler portions of the growing season when the ground is not frozen.

### Warm-season grasses

*Seeding:* Warm-season grasses may be seeded successfully between March 1 and July 1, depending on the species used. See Table 5 for different species and locations.

*Sodding:* Warm-season grasses are best established by sodding at the same dates suggested for seeding, about April until July 1. Sod will not produce roots unless the soil temperature exceeds 55°F for several weeks. Professional sod installers have been successful in establishing lawns beyond those dates, but care must be given to ensure that the soil does not dry out.

*Vegetative:* Warm-season grasses may be planted vegetatively (by sprigs or plugs) from March through July.

### How to Plant

Lawns can be established by seeding, sodding, or vegetative planting (sprigs or plugs). Buying poor-quality seed or plants often results in less-than-satisfactory performance, pest problems, and general disappointment. Selection of seeds or plants is especially important when establishing a lawn. Read the information on the seed tag carefully, and make sure you purchase seed with no noxious weed seed and low levels of other crop seed. One way to be sure you have seed or planting material that is true to type, free of noxious weed seed, and contains low levels of other crop seed, is to purchase certified seed or sod. A blue certified tag indicates that the seed or plants have met certain standards to assure high quality and low levels of contaminants. The North Carolina Crop Improvement Association (NCCIA) offers a list of certified seed producers on its Web site: <http://www.nccia.ncsu.edu/>.

**Seeding** is usually the fastest, most economical method of establishing grasses. To ensure uniform coverage, use a centrifugal (rotary) or drop-type spreader. Apply half the seed in one direction and the other half moving at right angles to the first pass (see Figure 3). Lightly cover the seed by hand raking or dragging with a mat or span of chain-link fence. Roll the soil lightly to firm the surface, and provide good seed-to-soil contact.

Mulch grass seed with weed-free small-grain straw or hay. Use one bale per 1,000 sq ft for warm-season grasses and one to two bales for cool-season grasses.

This will help conserve moisture, control erosion, and reduce surface crusting until establishment. Once in place, stabilize the mulch by rolling or watering. Twine netting can be used if wind displacement is a problem. If applied evenly and lightly, these materials need not be removed.

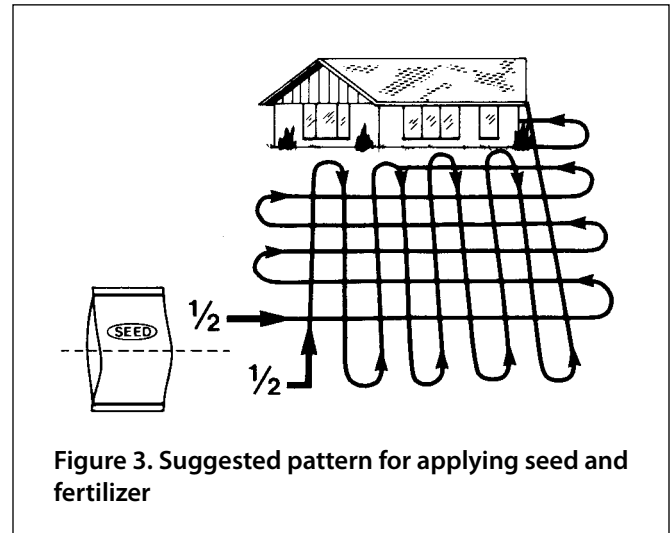


Figure 3. Suggested pattern for applying seed and fertilizer

**Vegetative planting** is necessary for some grasses that do not produce viable seed (seed that will germinate). When this method is used, the planting material must be kept fresh and moist from removal site to planting area. Keep planting material moist until established. Fertilize with 0.5 to 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft every one to three weeks for the fastest spread. Here are the methods most useful in lawn areas:

*Space planting* is the planting of separate shoots or sprigs (runners, cuttings, or stolons) at regular spacings. This labor-intensive method is best used for planting small areas. Spacing is determined by how fast the grass will spread, how fast you want it to cover, and how much material you have available. The closer the spacing, the faster the lawn will become established (see Figure 4).

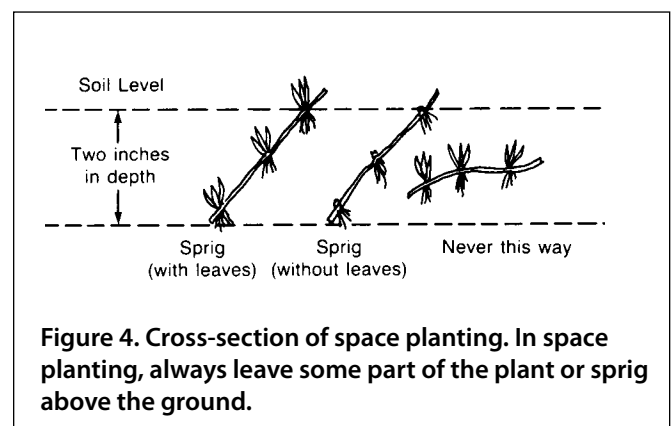


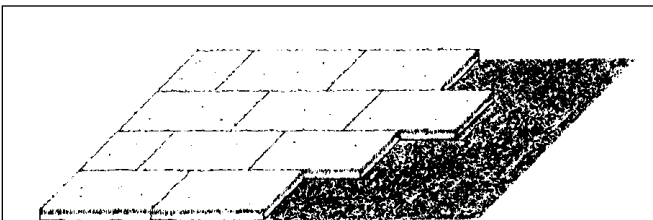
Figure 4. Cross-section of space planting. In space planting, always leave some part of the plant or sprig above the ground.

*Broadcasting* is the uniform distribution of sprigs (cut stems) over the entire area. The sprigs are pressed into the top 0.5 to 1 inch of soil by hand or by using an old disk set straight, special planter, cultipacker, or roller. Large areas planted with bermudagrass or zoysiagrass sprigs require a minimum of 3 to 5 bushels (yards) of sprigs per 1,000 square feet and 5 to 10 bushels (yards) for extremely fast cover. St. Augustinegrass is seldom established through broadcasting because the stems are too sensitive.

*Plugging* is planting individual pieces (2 inches or larger) of sod on 6-inch or 12-inch centers. This is an excellent way to introduce a more adapted lawn grass into an old lawn in an effort to replace old grass by crowding out. Zoysiagrass, St. Augustinegrass, and centipedegrass are often planted by plugging.

*Sodding* is placing sod stripped from one site to another for an “instant” lawn. Lay sod as soon as possible after it has been harvested to prevent injury.

1. Make sure the soil is moist (but not overly wet) before laying sod. Irrigating the soil several days before delivery is often adequate.
2. Install the sod within 24 hours of delivery. Plan to unstack and unroll the sod if it cannot be laid within 48 hours.
3. While installing, keep sod in the shade to lessen the chance of heat buildup.
4. Start sodding from a straight edge (driveway or sidewalk), and butt strips together, staggering them in a bricklike pattern (See Figure 5).
5. Avoid stretching sod. Use a knife or sharp spade for trimming to fit irregularly shaped areas.
6. Lay sod lengthwise across the face of slopes, and peg or stake the pieces to prevent slippage.
7. After the sod has been placed, roll the lawn to ensure good sod-to-soil contact. Then begin watering.



**Figure 5. Start sodding from a straight edge and butt strips together in a bricklike pattern.**

For a complete list of North Carolina sod producers and the varieties they carry, visit the North Carolina Sod Producers Association Web site: <http://www.ncsod.org>.

Again, to ensure high quality and better chance for success, it is highly recommended that certified sod be used. A list of producers growing certified sod can be found on the NCCIA Web site: <http://www.nccia.ncsu.edu/>.

The times and rates for planting vegetative grasses are given in Table 5.

## Caring for a New Lawn

### Irrigating

To prevent drying of planting material, keep the top 1.5 inches of the soil moist. This may require light watering two or three times a day for 7 to 21 days. Bluegrass takes 7 to 14 days longer to germinate than other cool-season grasses. As the seedlings grow and root, water less often but for longer periods. For mixtures containing bluegrass, do not make the mistake of decreasing water as soon as the seedlings appear. Continue watering until the bluegrass seedlings emerge. After the third mowing, water to a depth of 6 to 8 inches about once a week or when needed.

### Mowing

Begin mowing as soon as the grass is 50 percent higher than the desired height. For example, mow tall fescue back to 3 inches when it reaches 4.5 inches. The frequency of mowing is governed by the amount of growth, which depends on temperature, fertility, moisture conditions, the season, and the natural growth rate of the grass. The suggested height of cut is given in Table 2. The homeowner should cut often enough that less than 50 percent of the total leaf surface is removed. Use a mower with a sharp blade. To reduce the danger of spreading disease and injuring the turf, mow when the soil and plants are dry. If clippings are heavy enough to hold the grass down or shade it, catch them or rake and remove them. Otherwise, do not bag the clippings. Allow them to fall into the turf where they will decay and release nutrients. This may reduce the need for fertilizer by 20 to 30 percent.

### Pest Control

Fungicides and insecticides are rarely needed on new lawns, and different planting methods require different pest control methods. If pesticides are used, always read and follow label directions.

**Seeding.** Siduron (Tupersan 50WP) may be applied to cool-season grasses at the time of spring seeding for selective pre-emergence control of some annual grassy weeds like crabgrass. Other herbicides may be applied to young seedlings during establishment. Get the latest recommendations by visiting the NC State TurfFiles Web site.

Broadleaf weeds are common in new seedings. However, many will be controlled with frequent mowing at the proper height. After the lawn has been mowed three times, remaining weeds may be controlled using the minimum label rate of a broadleaf herbicide. The particular herbicide used depends upon the weeds present and the tolerance of the turfgrass to the herbicide.

**Space-planting sprigs, broadcasting sprigs, and plugging.** Atrazine (AAtrex) or simazine (Princep) may be applied for control of certain annual grass and broadleaf weeds when sprigging bermudagrass, centipede grass, St. Augustine grass, and zoysiagrass. Do not apply these herbicides over the rooting areas of trees and ornamentals that are not listed as being tolerant on the herbicide label.

**Sodding.** Pre-emergence herbicides, such as siduron (Tupersan) and bensulide (Betasan), can be applied for annual weedy grass control after sodding cool- and warm-season grasses.

## Maintaining An Established Lawn

Consider your lawn established when you have mowed it three times. Lawn Care Maintenance Calendars for specific grass types are available online through the NC State TurfFiles Web site: <http://www.TurfFiles.ncsu.edu>.

## Irrigating

Improper irrigation of lawns results in wasted water, added cost, and unhealthy plants. Water should be applied only when a reasonable portion of the lawn shows signs of moisture stress. A dark bluish-gray color; footprints that remain some time after walking; and wilted, folded, or curled leaves are indications that it is time to water. A delay in watering at the first signs of wilt will generally not result in permanent damage unless the turf is being allowed to go dormant.

If irrigation is not available or desirable, then an alternative to irrigating is to allow the turf to go semi-dormant to dormant. Tall fescue, bermudagrass, and zoysiagrass are tolerant of drought if allowed to go dormant. An irrigation water management program is available online through the NC State TurfFiles Web

site: <http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/tims/>. General watering recommendations include the following:

1. Water in the early morning if possible. This is the preferred time to water because it reduces the risk of disease, water loss through evaporation, and improper water distribution. Also, the demand for water by industry and municipalities is usually low at this time.
2. Water established lawns to a depth of 6 to 8 inches to encourage deep rooting. Usually, 1 inch of water per week is adequate. Ideally, this would not be applied in one application. Applying 0.5 inch of water every three to four days is adequate for most situations.
3. Use cans or a rain gauge to determine how much water is being delivered in a certain period of time. It takes 640 gallons of water to apply 1 inch of water per 1,000 sq. ft. Because clay soils accept water slowly, water should be measured to prevent wasteful runoff. Water clay soils until runoff is about to occur. Wait 30 minutes for the water to be absorbed. Then apply more water until the desired depth or amount is achieved. This same technique can be used on slopes and compacted soils. Few lawns established on clay soils can absorb more than 0.5 inch of water per hour. Sandy soils require more frequent watering. Applying 0.5 inch of water every third day is usually sufficient. Adjust any automatic irrigation system to supplement rainfall so that the lawn is not over-watered.

Take certain precautions if you do not plan to irrigate throughout the summer. Slowly ease a lush, actively growing lawn into dormancy. This can be accomplished by allowing the drought stress symptoms to appear between infrequent irrigation cycles, by mowing high, and by not over-fertilizing with nitrogen. Brown, withered leaves are normal signs of dormancy, so do not be alarmed by them. If the lawn is conditioned for this stress and has a reasonable level of maintenance, it should survive without permanent damage. Most turfgrasses can withstand 3 to 6 weeks (or longer) without rainwater or irrigation and exhibit minimal or no damage, depending on the situation.

In the absence of rain, water dormant lawns with a minimal amount (about 0.25 inch) every three weeks to keep the growing points hydrated. It is difficult to maintain vibrant green color in cool-season grasses during the summer. Irrigation helps maintain color, but may also increase the risk of disease. For this reason, it is particularly important that cool-season grasses not be overwatered.



## Mowing

Use either a rotary (centrifugal) or reel (cylinder) mower. The reel mower is preferred if grasses are cut to less than 1 inch.

1. Keep the mower blades sharp and balanced. The cleanest cut and best mowing are obtained when the mower blades are sharp. Dull mower blades reduce lawn quality by tearing instead of cleanly cutting the grass. Tearing creates many ragged leaf ends that quickly wither and bleach and are easy ports of entry for disease. Using a sharp mower is especially important for difficult-to-mow grasses, such as zoysiagrass, bahiagrass, and certain types of perennial ryegrass cultivars. A properly sharpened and balanced mower blade will also reduce mower vibration, lengthen mower life, and reduce fuel consumption by as much as 22 percent.
2. Mow at the proper height. The frequency of mowing is governed by the desired grass height and by the amount of growth, which depends on temperature, fertility, moisture conditions, season, and the natural growth rate of the grass. In most instances, this may amount to biweekly and weekly mowing. To maintain a high-quality lawn, turfgrass should be cut often enough that less than 50 percent of the leaf surface is removed with each mowing. The proper mowing heights are presented in Table 2. If the lawn gets too high during wet seasons, raise the mower and cut off a fourth to a half of the present growth. Then lower the mower to its proper height and mow again in a day or two.
3. Leave clippings to decompose when they are short. Most homeowners bag lawn clippings because they think that the clippings add to the buildup of thatch, which can be harmful to the lawn. Actually, thatch is made up of roots, stems, and the lower portions of leaves that are below the mower blade. Frequent mowing, mowing when the grass is dry, and proper fertilization are the best ways to reduce thatch buildup. Though studies have shown that a lawn of 1,000 square feet can produce 500 pounds of clippings in one growing season, these clippings contribute very little to thatch. In fact, clippings that remain on the lawn quickly decompose and release valuable nutrients. Fertilizer use can be reduced by 20 to 30 percent.
4. Rake, bag, and remove the clippings when mowing is delayed. If prolonged periods of rainfall prevent mowing, clippings may be long enough to shade or smother the grass. In this case, rake, bag, and

remove the clippings. Collected clippings can be used as mulch around trees and shrubs or added to compost. Because yard trash accounts for 20 percent of the waste in our overflowing landfills, legislation has been passed that bans depositing yard trash in most public landfills. Homeowners must now look for other alternatives. Contact your county Cooperative Extension center for information about composting yard trash and other uses for this material.

## Fertilizing

A soil test should be made at least every two to three years to determine the amounts of lime, phosphorus, and potassium needed by your established lawn. See page 11 for the method used to obtain a good soil sample. A complete fertilizer with an N-P-K ratio of 4:1:2 or 4:1:3 can be used in lieu of a soil test, but it is a poor substitute.

Determine the amount of fertilizer, ratio of nutrients or fertilizer elements, and time of application based on the grasses being grown. See Table 6a, b, or c, depending on your region (pages 18 and 19), to determine the amount of nitrogen fertilizer to apply and the time of application.

**Cool season grasses.** Avoid any nitrogen fertilization of cool-season grasses, such as tall fescue, after the February application until September for the central piedmont.

If one additional application of nitrogen is made between these dates to improve the color, the rate should not exceed 0.5 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. This nitrogen should be applied in the central piedmont no later than April 15 (two weeks earlier in the coastal plain and two weeks later in the mountains). This application will not improve the longevity of tall fescue but will enhance its green color.

The application of high rates or repeated low rates of nitrogen to cool-season grasses in the spring or summer greatly increases the severity of brown patch (*Rhizoctonia* species), which can kill the grass and should be avoided. If spring or summer nitrogen applications, or both, are applied to tall fescue, fungicide applications may be necessary to reduce disease symptoms.

**Warm-season grasses.** Avoid fall or winter applications of nitrogen to reduce winter injury.

**Lime.** Most soils in North Carolina are acidic and often require the application of lime to sweeten the soil. For most turfgrasses, except centipedegrass, soil pH should be between 6.5 and 7.0 for optimum nutri-

ent availability. Centipedegrass requires more acidic soil with a pH close to 5.5. Lime may be put on any time during the year. Winter is usually best, however, because there is less traffic. Gentle winter rains minimize runoff, and alternate freezing and thawing help incorporate lime into the soil.

Fertilizers and lime should be applied uniformly with a centrifugal (rotary) or drop-type spreader. Apply half the fertilizer in one direction and the other half moving at right angles to the first pass to ensure uniform coverage (see Figure 3).

### Coring (Aerification)

Soils that are subject to heavy traffic are prone to compaction. Coring will alleviate this condition. Use a device that removes soil cores. Chop up the cores, and, if possible, distribute them by dragging with a span of chain-link fence or a mat.

Coring should be accomplished when the lawn is actively growing so that it can recover from any injury. Core cool-season grasses in fall or early spring. Core warm-season grasses in late spring or early summer. Some lawn care and landscape companies offer coring service if rental equipment is not available.

### Power Raking (Verticutting)

Sod-forming grasses, such as Kentucky bluegrass, bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, St. Augustinegrass, and centipedegrass, tend to build up thatch when they are heavily fertilized and watered. When thatch exceeds 0.75 inch, lawns should be power raked and cored.

A light power raking is better than trying to remove too much debris at one time. When not exces-

sive, thatch buildup can be removed from warm-season grasses by cutting as closely as possible at spring green-up and then raking by hand. To avoid seriously injuring the lawn, a 3-inch blade spacing is required to remove thatch from centipedegrass and St. Augustinegrass. Some lawn care and landscape companies have specialized equipment and offer power raking services.

### Renovating a Lawn

Lawn renovation refers to any procedure beyond normal maintenance (short of soil modification) required to upgrade an existing lawn. A deteriorated lawn is often a symptom of some underlying problem. Failure to identify and correct the exact problem can lead to further lawn deterioration and the need for repeated renovation. These are some of the major causes of turf deterioration:

- poor establishment procedures
- improper lawn management
- poorly adapted lawn grasses
- improper nutrient balance
- excessive thatch buildup
- disease, insect, or weed infestation

The problems that caused the lawn to deteriorate must be corrected before the renovation process begins.

### When to Renovate

Late summer to early fall is the best time to renovate cool-season lawns. Warm-season lawns are best renovated in late spring to early summer. Attempts to upgrade existing lawns when conditions are not conducive to good growth are difficult at best.

**Table 6a. Suggested Maintenance Fertilization of Established Lawns in the Coastal Region**

Lawn Grass Type	Fertilization	Monthly Application Rate (lb N/1,000 sq ft)												Total lb N Per 1,000 sq ft/yr
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	
Bermudagrass	Basic				1		1		1					3
	High				1	1	1	1	1	1				6
Centipedegrass	Basic					1								1
	High					1			1					2
Tall fescue	Basic		0.5							1		0.5		2
	High		1	0.5						1	1	0.5		4
St. Augustinegrass	Basic					1			1					2
	High				0.5	1	0.5	1	0.5	0.5				4
Zoysiagrass (Emerald and Meyer cultivars)	Basic					1			1					2
	High				1		1		1					3
Zoysiagrass (other cultivars)	Basic					1			1					2
	High				1	0.5	1	0.5	1					4

**Table 6b. Suggested Maintenance Fertilization for Established Lawns in the Piedmont**

Lawn Grass Type	Fertilization	Monthly Application Rate (lb N/1,000 sq ft)												Total lb N Per 1,000 sq ft/yr
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	
Bermudagrass	Basic					1		1		1				3
	High				1	1	1	1	1	1				6
Centipedegrass	Basic					1								1
	High					1			1					2
Tall fescue	Basic		0.5							1		0.5		2
	High		1	0.5						1	1	0.5		4
Kentucky bluegrass	Basic		0.5							1		0.5		2
	High		1	0.5						1	1	0.5		4
Kentucky bluegrass/ fine fescue mix	Basic		0.5							1		0.5		2
	High		1	0.5						1	1	0.5		4
Kentucky bluegrass/ tall fescue mix	Basic		0.5							1		0.5		2
	High		1	0.5						1	1	0.5		4
Kentucky bluegrass/ tall fescue/fine fescue mix	Basic		0.5							1		0.5		2
	High		1	0.5						1	1	0.5		4
Kentucky bluegrass/ perennial ryegrass mix	Basic		1							1		1		3
	High		1	0.5						1	1	0.5		4
St. Augustinegrass	Basic					1			1					2
	High					1		1		1				3
Zoysiagrass (Emerald and Meyer cultivars)	Basic					1								1
	High				1			1						2
Zoysiagrass (other cultivars)	Basic					1		1						2
	High				1		1		1					3

**Table 6c. Suggested Maintenance Fertilization of Established Lawns for the Mountains**

Lawn Grass Type	Fertilization	Monthly Application Rate (lb N/1,000 sq ft)												Total lb N Per 1,000 sq ft/yr
		J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	
Bermudagrass	Basic					1		1						2
	High					1	1	1	1					4
Tall fescue	Basic			0.5					1		0.5			2
	High			1					1		1			3
Kentucky bluegrass	Basic			1					1					2
	High			1					1		1			3
Kentucky bluegrass/ fine fescue mix	Basic			1					1					2
	High			1					1		1			3
Kentucky bluegrass/ tall fescue mix	Basic			1					1					2
	High			1					1		1			3
Kentucky bluegrass/tall fescue/fine fescue mix	Basic			1					1					2
	High			1					1		1			3
Kentucky bluegrass/ perennial ryegrass mix	Basic			1					1		0.5			2.5
	High			1					1	1	0.5			3.5
Zoysiagrass (all cultivars)	Basic					0.5			0.5					1
	High					1		1						2

## Weed Control

The first step in lawn renovation is the control of undesirable vegetation that will compete with newly planted grasses. Some weeds growing in small areas may be controlled by hand weeding or removal using a small hoe, rake, or shovel. Hard-to-control weeds, such as perennial grasses with underground shoots or weeds in large areas, are best controlled with herbicides.

Spray most postemergence broadleaf herbicides four to six weeks before seeding. Most selective post-emergence herbicides that control annual grassy weeds, such as crabgrass, should also be applied at least four weeks before seeding.

To control perennial grassy weeds, undesirable turfgrasses, annual grasses, and broadleaf weeds, spray the nonselective herbicide glyphosate (various trade names, such as Roundup or Kleenup). However, it will take several applications spaced three to four weeks apart to completely control bermudagrass. If perennial grassy weeds like bermudagrass are scattered throughout, consider killing the entire lawn.

When using glyphosate, do not disturb the soil or plants before treatment. Tillage or renovation techniques such as vertical mowing, coring, or slicing should be delayed for seven days after application to allow proper movement of the herbicide into underground parts of the weeds.

Young and actively growing weeds are easiest to control, so make sure that the soil is moist several days before application. Carefully read and follow directions and precautions on the herbicide labels. Treat only those areas that need it.

## Preparation for Seeding

Preplanting renovation procedures are designed to create the optimum environment for the establishment of newly planted grasses. This process includes the following steps:

1. Reduce competition from existing grasses and remove unwanted vegetation, including thatch.
2. Apply the required fertilizer and lime.
3. Prepare a good seedbed.

**Reduce competition.** Set the rotary or reel mower at the lowest setting, mow, and collect the clippings. Remove all undesirable vegetation, dead grass, thatch, and weeds so that the soil is exposed. This may not be necessary if a slit seeder is used. A rake or hoe is ideal for small areas. Several passes with a dethatcher (power raker or vertical mower) is usually the best

choice for large areas. If thatch is excessive, it may be necessary to make another pass with a dethatcher after mowing. Both mowing and dethatching reduce plant competition and enhance light penetration for good germination and fast establishment.

**Apply fertilizer and lime.** Uniformly apply needed fertilizer and lime based on soil test results. Hand application is fine for small areas, but a rotary or drop-type spreader should be used on large areas to ensure uniform application.

**Prepare a good seedbed.** In small bare spots, loosen the top 4 to 6 inches of the soil with a rake, hoe, or shovel. On soils difficult to loosen with hand equipment, loosen the top 2 to 3 inches for good to excellent results. Fill in low areas, and smooth the surface so clods are smaller than marbles. Large areas and areas that contain 50 percent desirable grasses are best prepared for seeding by using a piece of equipment (such as an aerator or coring machine) that brings small soil cores to the surface. This will bring soil to the surface with minimal disruption and create an environment for good seed-to-soil contact. Core in several directions, allow plugs to dry, and then pulverize them with a mower, dethatcher, or span of chain link fence. Because tines have a difficult time penetrating dry, compacted soils, coring is best achieved when the soil is damp.

## Seeding

Bare spots larger than 4 inches in diameter should be replanted. Smaller areas tend to fill in naturally, provided the lawn grass is capable of spreading. Tall fescue and perennial ryegrass exhibit a bunch-type growth habit and are incapable of spreading. Choose a blend or mixture that is compatible with the environment and the existing lawn.

To ensure uniform coverage, use a rotary or drop-type spreader, applying half the seed in one direction and the other half at right angles to the first pass. Incorporate seed and fertilizer into the top 1/8-inch of soil by lightly pulling a leaf rake over loosened soil or running a vertical slicer over areas that were just power raked and cored.

A slit seeder, consisting of a vertical grooving seeder and seed box, can be used to drill seed to ensure good seed-to-soil contact with minimum disruption. Seed should be drilled in a diamond-shaped pattern. Dry, compacted soils, obstructions such as rocks and trees, and excessive slopes may limit the usefulness of a slit seeder. Bare areas that are seeded should be mulched to enhance germination.

## Plugging

Plugging can be used for those grasses that spread laterally—not bunch-type grasses such as tall fescue, ryegrass, bahiagrass, and fine fescue. Place plugs on either 6-inch or 12-inch centers, depending on the desired establishment speed. Use a plugging device to remove plugs of soil from bare areas, and switch them with plugs collected from healthy areas. Apply a starter-type fertilizer, such as 10 pounds per square foot of 5-10-10 fertilizer.

## Sprigging Large Areas

Large areas of 15,000 sq ft or more can be sprigged using this method, which is often reserved for bermudagrass. Rototill the recommended amount of fertilizer and lime, indicated by soil test results, or apply lime at 75 pounds per 1,000 sq ft and 10-10-10 fertilizer at 20 pounds per 1,000 sq ft to the area to be sprigged. Spread sprigs over the surface using rates provided in Table 5 for new areas. Press them into the top 0.5 to 1 inch of soil using an old disk set straight, special planter, cultipacker, or roller. Roll the area to firm the soil and ensure sprig-to-soil contact.

## Care After Planting

Keep renovated areas moist with light sprinklings several times a day. As the seedlings, plugs, or sprigs grow, continue to decrease the frequency of waterings while increasing the duration to promote deep rooting. After the third mowing, water to a depth of 6 inches.

Mow the area as you normally would, using a sharp blade. But continue to severely stunt existing vegetation by mowing short until desirable grasses have germinated and the desired mowing height is achieved. This will reduce the competition for new seedlings.

Fertilize the new seedlings of cool-season grasses as described for “fertilize after planting” in the section on *Fertilization* (page 12). Use the example provided in that section to determine how much fertilizer to use.

Warm-season grasses can be fertilized every four weeks until coverage is complete. Use a complete N-P-K fertilizer that provides about 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft. Twice-monthly applications of a nitrogen-only fertilizer that provides about 0.5 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft may help warm-season grasses fill in more rapidly. Keep unnecessary traffic off the renovated lawn until it is well established.

## Integrated Pest Management

People are becoming more aware of and concerned about the effects of chemicals on our environment. Research indicates that pesticide use poses a minimal threat to the health of humans, animals, and the environment. But because we can't be certain, many people choose to avoid pesticides. So how would you handle a pest problem that is destroying the appearance of your lawn? Do you use pesticides, change cultural practices, or both?

The balanced use of all available control methods is called *integrated pest management* (IPM). The idea is simple. All available prevention and control methods are used to keep pests from reaching damaging levels. Pesticides are used only when necessary.

Planting the best-adapted grass and then watering, mowing, and fertilizing it properly form the basis for integrated pest management. Keeping the lawn healthy enables it to tolerate low levels of pests and makes the area a good habitat for beneficial organisms that help control pests.

To best use natural controls, it is important to develop a sound understanding of the biology and ecology of the lawn environment. Fortunately, many books and other educational materials are now available to assist the homeowner. Also, many companies offer materials for organic lawn care. These range from nematodes that attack caterpillars to traps and repellents. Some of these are quite effective, whereas the effectiveness of others has not been documented. As each product is tested and proven to be effective, it will be added to the list of available options for turf pest management. In the meantime, if chemical control is necessary, select the safest effective pesticide and follow label recommendations. Chemicals should be applied when the pest is most susceptible. Treat only those areas in need, and regard pesticides as only one of many tools available in lawn care. Integrated pest management can be successful, but homeowners must realize that more time and labor are required and high expectations may not be met when pest pressures and environmental conditions are severe.

## Glossary

### **Active ingredient**

The chemical in a pesticide that controls the target pest.

### **Aerification**

Removal of soil cores from a turf with hollow tines or spoons.

### **Annual**

A plant that starts from seed and completes its life cycle within the same growing season.

### **Auricle**

A claw-like appendage projecting from the collar of the leaf.

### **Biennial**

A plant that starts from seed and requires two years to complete its life cycle.

### **Blade**

The flat portion of the grass leaf above the sheath.

### **Blend, seed**

A combination of two or more cultivars of the same species, for example Rebel and Falcon tall fescue.

### **Broadcast**

Uniform application to an entire area.

### **Broadleaf plants**

Plants with flattened leaves; dicots, plants that possess two seedling leaves.

### **Bud leaf**

First emerged leaf of a grass plant.

### **Bunchgrass, bunch-type growth**

Plant development in the absence of rhizome and stolon production; a nonspreading grass.

### **Cool-season grasses**

Turf species that have optimum growth at temperatures between 60 and 75°F.

### **Coring**

See aerification.

### **Creeping growth habit**

Plant development at or near the soil surface that results in lateral spreading by rhizomes, stolons, or both.

### **Crop seed**

Any seed grown for profit, often including undesirable grassy weeds, such as orchardgrass.

### **Crown**

The portion of a grass plant that includes the stem apex, unelongated internodes, and lower nodes from which secondary roots begin.

### **Cultivar**

A cultivated variety of a species, such as K-31 and Rebel.

### **Cultivation**

In turf, the working of the soil without the destruction of the turf.

### **Dormancy**

The resting stage of a plant or ripe seeds during which nearly all manifestations of life come to an almost complete standstill.

### **Herbicide, contact**

Herbicide that injures only those portions of a plant with which it comes into contact.

### **Herbicide, nonselective**

Herbicide that kills or injures all plants. Some plant species may exhibit more tolerance than others. Examples include glyphosate (Roundup, Touchdown Pro), and glufosinate (Finale).

### **Herbicide, postemergence (POST)**

Herbicide that needs to be applied after weeds emerge to be effective.

### **Herbicide, pre-emergence (PRE)**

Herbicide that needs to be applied before weeds emerge to be effective. Can be applied before or after turf establishment. Rainfall or irrigation is often needed to move the chemical into the top few inches of the soil for best activity.

### **Herbicide, selective**

Herbicide that kills or injures some plants without harming others.

### **Herbicide, systemic**

Herbicide that is taken up through contact with the leaves or through the soil (via contact with the roots) and is moved throughout the plant to kill the whole plant.

### **Inflorescence**

The flowering portion of a plant.

### **Larva**

A stage in the development of certain insects, caterpillars (butterfly larva), or grubs (beetle larva).

### **Ligule**

A thin projection from the top of the leaf sheath in grasses; it may be a fringe of hairs, membranous, or absent.

### **Mixture, seed**

A combination of seeds of two or more species, for example Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass.

### **Nematode**

A microscopic, worm-like organism.

### **Nitrogen, quick release**

Readily available sources of nitrogen that exhibit fast turf greening, short residual, and high burn potential, such as ammonium nitrate.

### **Nitrogen, slow release**

Slowly available sources of nitrogen that exhibit slow turf green-up, long residual, and low burn potential, such as IBDU, urea formaldehyde.

### **Node**

A joint where leaves, roots, branches, or stems arise.

### **Nymph**

A stage in the development of certain insects where the young resemble the adult in form, eat the same food, and reside in the same environment.

### **Pathogen**

The causal agent of disease.

### **Perennial plant**

A plant that may or may not start from seed, may or may not produce seed, and lives more than two years.

### **Raking, power**

Removal of debris with rapidly rotating vertical tines or brush.

### **Rhizome**

An underground creeping stem that can produce roots and shoots at each node.

**Scalping**

Excessive removal of turf leaves by close mowing. Results in a brown, stubby appearance.

**Sclerotia**

Seed-like, compact masses of fungal tissue that allow fungi to survive unfavorable conditions.

**Seed, certified**

A seed lot inspected to meet minimum standards and to ensure trueness to type for a given cultivar.

**Sheath**

The basal portion of the leaf surrounding the grass stem. In grass plants, it is usually split with overlapping edges.

**Slicing**

Penetration of turf in a vertical plane by a series of solid flat tines.

**Spiking**

Penetration of turf in a vertical plane by series of solid round tines.

**Sprig**

A stolon or rhizome used to establish turf.

**Stolon**

An above-ground creeping stem that can produce roots and shoots at each node.

**Symptom**

The visual characteristics associated with a given disease.

**Thatch**

A tightly intermingled layer of undecomposed roots, stems, and shoots located between the soil surface and the green vegetation of the turf grass.

**Tiller**

A grass plant shoot arising in the axes of leaves in the unelongated portion of the stem.

**Tolerance, turf**

Ability of a turf species to withstand application of a pesticide (herbicide) at the normal dosage without being killed or injured. Specific tolerance may be associated with an anatomical or physiological characteristic in the plant.

**Topdressing**

A sand or prepared soil mix applied to the turf to help smooth the surface, enhance establishment, and reduce thatch buildup.

**Tuber**

An underground stem modified for food storage that is attached to the root system as found in yellow nutsedge.

**Turf**

A covering of mowed vegetation, usually a grass.

**Turfgrass**

A species or cultivar of grass, usually of spreading habit, which is maintained as a mowed turf.

**Warm-season grasses**

Turf that has its optimum growth at temperatures between 80 and 95°F.

**Weed**

A plant growing where it is not wanted.

**Wetting agent**

A chemical that aids in liquid-to-surface contact.

**For More Information**

This and the following Extension publications about lawns are available on the NC State TurfFiles Web site: <http://www.TurfFiles.ncsu.edu/>. Or contact your county Cooperative Extension center for copies.

***Tall Fescue Lawn Maintenance Calendar (AG-367)***

<http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/articles/tf0017.aspx>

***Centipedegrass Lawn Maintenance Calendar (AG-381)***

<http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/articles/tf0019.aspx>

***Bermudagrass Lawn Calendar (AG-431)***

<http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/articles/tf0016.aspx>

***Zoysiagrass Lawn Calendar (AG-432)***

<http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/articles/tf0020.aspx>

***Diseases of Warm-Season Grasses (AG-360)***

<http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/articles/tf0033.aspx>

***Controlling White Grubs in Turf (AG-366)***

<http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/articles/tf00506.aspx>

***Carolina Lawns***

<http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/articles/tf4175.aspx>

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