

A HOME GARDENER'S GUIDE

FALL LAWN CARE

Build stronger roots and prepare
your grass for winter.



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START HERE

A healthier lawn starts below the surface

Fall lawn care is easier when you stop treating every lawn the same. A fescue lawn may need fresh seed while the Bermuda next door needs time to slow down. The right work now helps protect the living roots and crowns that carry your lawn into next spring.

Use this guide for established residential lawns and small repairs. It covers the grass types common across North America, with measurements in US units and metric equivalents. Follow your local growing conditions if you garden elsewhere. A warm coastal lawn may keep growing through winter while an inland lawn becomes fully dormant.

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Start with three observations

Identify your grass. Check whether it is still growing. Look at the soil beneath a weak patch before buying seed or fertilizer.

Timing throughout the guide follows the lawn's condition. Calendar dates from Minnesota, Maryland or the Carolinas cannot be copied unchanged to every region. Local extension guidance, product labels and local application restrictions take priority.

GRASS TYPE & TIMING

Choose the right fall plan

Cool-season grasses grow well during mild spring and fall weather. Warm-season grasses grow hardest in summer and slow as temperatures drop. Use the dominant desirable grass in your lawn to choose your plan.

Your lawn	Early fall, while growth continues	As growth slows
Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, fine fescue or perennial ryegrass	Repair thin turf. Aerate compacted soil before seeding. Feed only if the lawn's fertility plan calls for it.	Reduce irrigation as demand falls. Keep leaves from matting. Finish mowing when growth stops.
Bermuda, Zoysia or St. Augustine	Complete any remaining summer care within the local growing window. Avoid starting disruptive work close to dormancy.	Stop nitrogen feeding at the local cutoff. Defer aeration and major repair until active growth returns. Remove leaf mats.

Use the weather as your calendar

Signal	What to do
Cool-season lawn is growing again after summer stress	Plan seeding early in the local fall window. Aim for at least 6-8 weeks before the average first hard freeze, especially with slow bluegrass.
Warm-season lawn is slowing before frost	Leave recovery time. In frost-prone areas, many local programs end nitrogen 6-8 weeks before expected frost. Confirm the cutoff for your species and region.
Soil is saturated, frozen or drought-hard	Postpone aeration, spreading and traffic. Seed preparation needs workable soil.
Mild, frost-free winter with continued growth	Follow a local year-round program. Do not force a dormancy schedule onto actively growing turf.

First frost and a hard freeze are different markers. A light frost may leave time for established grass to grow, but a run of freezing weather can end seedling establishment. Start repairs early enough to allow several mowings where the season permits.

Sources: 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

WHAT FALL CARE CHANGES

Protect the roots and the crown

The crown sits near the soil surface and produces new shoots and roots. A lawn can turn brown yet remain alive if its crowns and roots survive. Leaves capture light and make sugars, so cutting too short removes part of the plant's food-making surface.

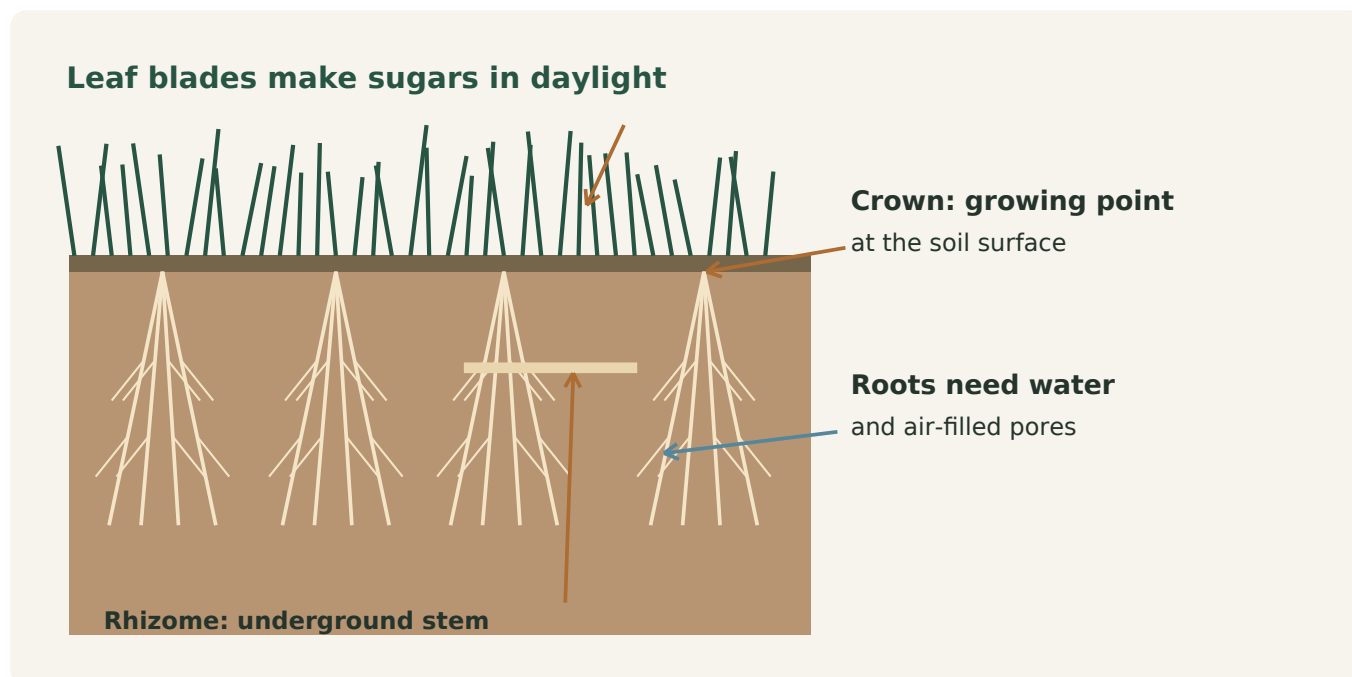


Figure 1. A turf profile. Rhizomes occur in spreading grasses such as Kentucky bluegrass, Bermuda and Zoysia. The drawing is schematic.

Give roots conditions they can use

- 1 **Keep the soil open.** Compaction reduces pore space. Core aeration can help when turf is growing, but cannot correct buried rubble or a badly graded low spot.
- 2 **Water the soil beneath the turf.** Established roots benefit when moisture reaches their actual depth. Repeated surface wetting encourages a shallow wet layer.
- 3 **Leave enough leaf.** Stay within the mowing range for your grass. Roots and shoots share the same limited energy supply.
- 4 **Avoid a late growth rush.** Extra nitrogen cannot rescue a lawn entering dormancy. It can leave excessive soft growth and increase disease risk.

Dormancy is a survival response. Uniform browning in a warm-season lawn after cold weather can be normal. Expanding circles, loose turf or patches that began while surrounding grass was growing deserve a closer look.

Sources: 1, 3, 5 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

SURVEY & SOIL TEST

Walk the lawn before buying anything

Take a few photos of the whole lawn and its weakest areas. Mark shade, puddles, footpaths and places where pets gather. If the same patch fails every year, a fresh handful of seed will probably face the same problem.

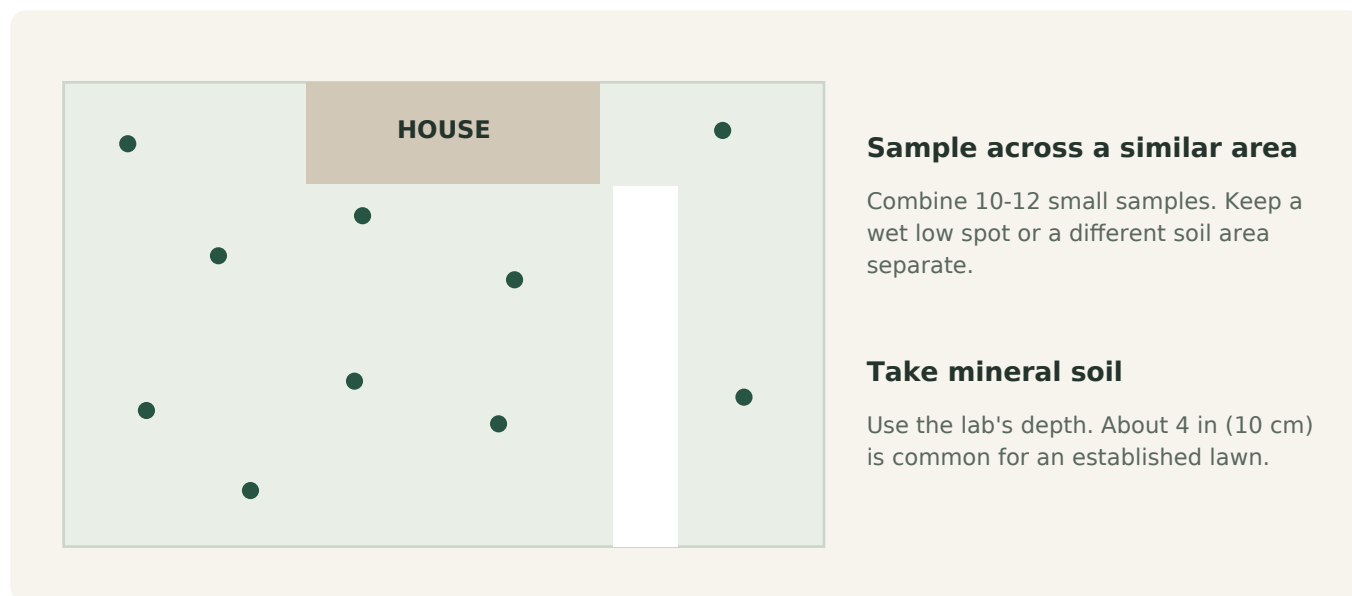


Figure 2. A sample route for one fairly uniform lawn area. Avoid fertilizer spills, compost piles and unusual spots in the mixed sample.

- 1 **Measure the turf.** Break irregular shapes into rectangles and triangles. Subtract beds, paving and buildings. Record the total on page 25.
- 2 **Check below the surface.** Lift a small turf wedge at a healthy spot and a weak one. Compare roots, moisture and the springy brown thatch layer above the mineral soil. Replace each wedge.
- 3 **Send a representative soil sample.** Use a clean trowel and bucket. Combine small samples from one similar area, remove debris and follow the laboratory's drying and packing instructions.
- 4 **Read the recommendation.** Use pH and nutrient results to decide on lime, phosphorus and potassium. Routine nitrogen advice usually comes from grass type and management needs, not a direct soil nitrogen measurement.

Keep a small job kit ready

Leaf rake, measuring tape, soil probe or trowel, labeled sample bag, lawn seed if needed, spreader, watering equipment and a rain gauge. Rent a hollow-tine aerator only when the survey shows compaction.

TASK 1 / PRACTICAL METHOD



- 2 Check moisture.** The soil should be moist enough to release a plug but firm enough to walk on without leaving deep prints. Water dry soil ahead of time and allow it to drain.
- 3 Mark hidden obstacles.** Flag irrigation heads, shallow pipes, cables and tree roots. Use the machine's instructions, especially on slopes. Keep children and pets clear.
- 4 Make a test pass.** Inspect the plugs. A useful target is about 2-3 in (5-8 cm) deep, with holes roughly 2-4 in (5-10 cm) apart. Adjust within the machine's safe operating range.
- 5 Cover the affected area.** A second pass across the first often improves hole density. Lift the tines for turns and paving. Concentrate on compacted routes rather than aerating a healthy lawn by habit.
- 6 Let the plugs break down.** Leave cores on the lawn. After aerating cool-season turf, sow prepared thin areas promptly. Keep normal mowing and moisture care while the grass recovers.

Skip spiked shoes as a treatment for compaction. Pushing a solid point into soil does not remove a core. Stop if the machine smears wet soil or barely penetrates hard ground.

Sources: 5, 6 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

TASK 1 / TECHNICAL DETAIL

Check the holes, then check the thatch

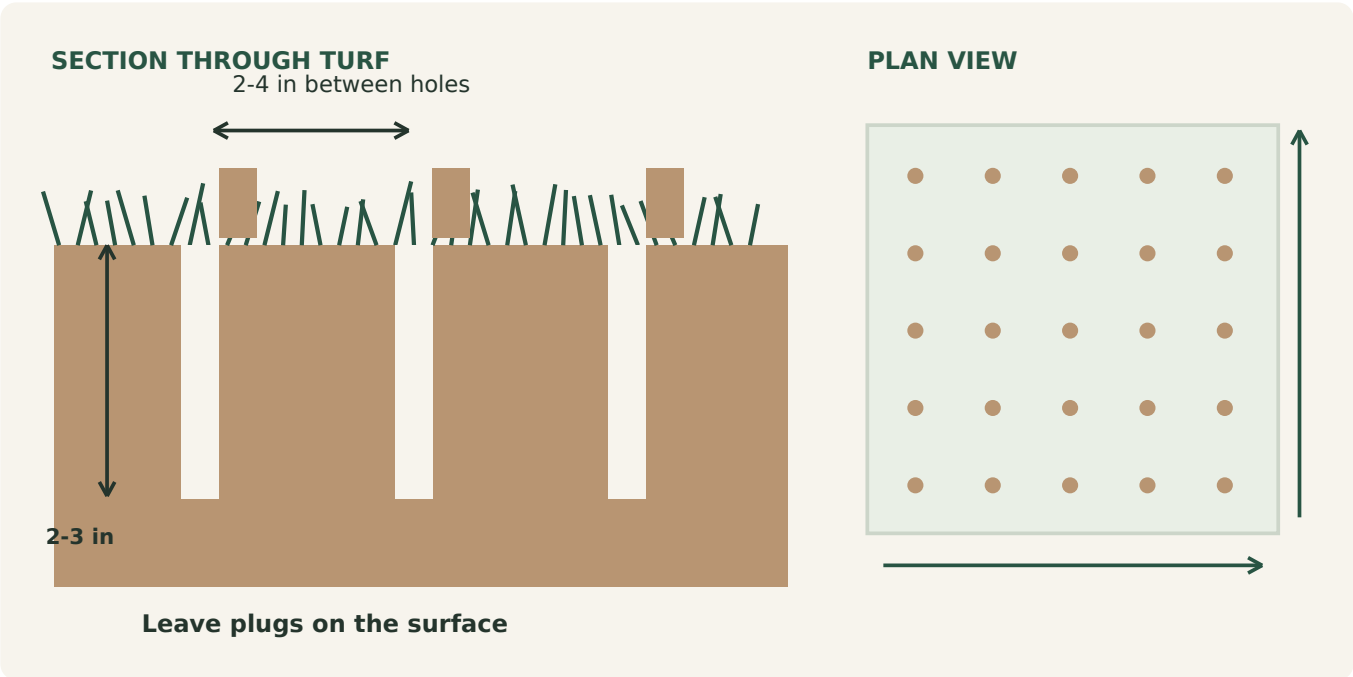


Figure 3. Typical residential core-aeration targets. Depth and spacing are working guides, not a guarantee that every machine reaches them.

Aeration and dethatching do different jobs

Aeration removes soil cores. Dethatching cuts or pulls out an excessive layer of stems, roots and other slow-decaying material between the green grass and soil. Loose leaves on top of the lawn are debris, not thatch. Short grass clippings normally break down and are not the main cause of thatch.

What you find	What to do
Hard soil with shallow roots and heavy foot traffic	Core-aerate during active growth. Reduce repeat traffic and review watering.
A distinct springy layer above the soil	Measure it before acting. Around 1/2-3/4 in (13-19 mm) can warrant assessment, but the action threshold varies by grass.
Dense Zoysia or St. Augustine with thatch	Ask for species-specific advice before power raking. Close blade spacing can tear up runners. Schedule any removal during vigorous warm-season growth.
Standing water despite open soil	Check downspouts, grading and drainage. Aeration is unlikely to solve a persistent low spot by itself.

Avoid stacking stressful jobs. Record thatch and compaction now, then plan disruptive work for the grass's next recovery season.

Sources: 5, 8, 9, 10 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

TASK 2 / COOL-SEASON REPAIR



- 1 **Fix the cause and choose seed.** Correct traffic, drainage or watering faults first. Match the existing lawn and site with locally recommended turf cultivars. Use perennial ryegrass for a permanent cool-season lawn, not annual ryegrass.
- 2 **Work early enough.** Use the local late-summer or early-fall sowing window. Bluegrass needs more establishment time than ryegrass. Delay major work if a hard freeze is too close.
- 3 **Prepare the patch.** Remove weeds and dead material. Loosen roughly the top 1 in (2.5 cm) of bare soil, break clods and rake level. Keep the finished surface flush with nearby turf.
- 4 **Open thin existing turf.** Mow a healthy cool-season lawn toward 2-2.5 in if suitable for its species, lowering it over earlier cuts if needed. Remove bulky clippings and aerate only where compacted.
- 5 **Measure and sow.** Use the seed label's overseeding rate on thin turf and new-lawn rate on bare soil. Divide the measured seed into halves and spread in crossing directions.
- 6 **Press and water.** Rake lightly so seed touches soil without deep burial. Firm with a light roller or flat board on small patches. Water with a gentle spray and protect the area from traffic.

Most pre-emergent weed killers also stop lawn seed from establishing. Check every recent herbicide label for seeding intervals, and every new product for seedling restrictions.

Sources: 2, 6, 7 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

TASK 2 / AFTERCARE

Keep seedlings alive after sowing

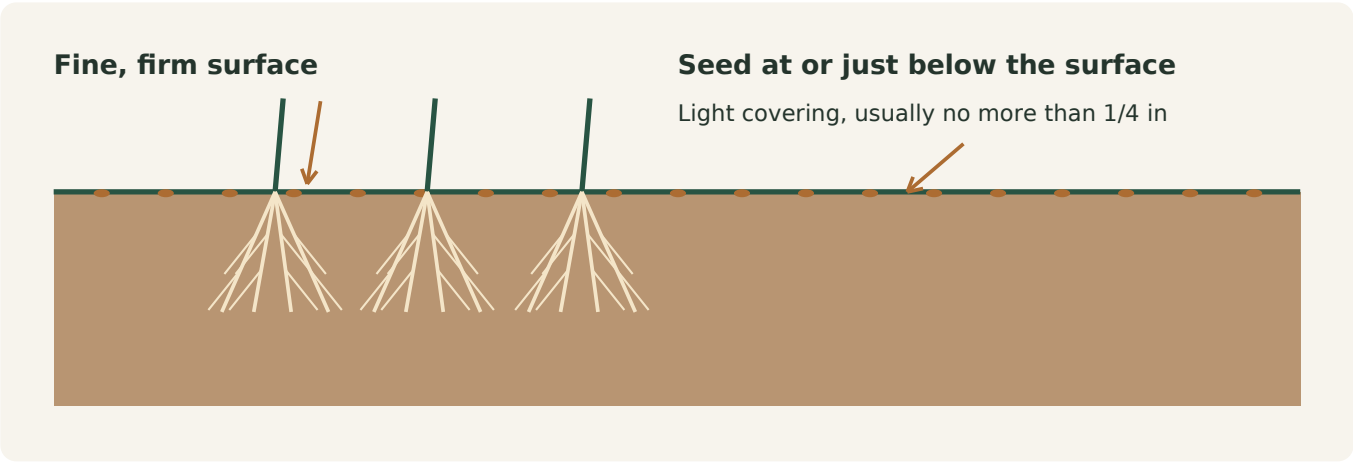


Figure 4. Seed-to-soil contact. Follow the seed label's covering depth. A heavy blanket of topsoil or compost can bury small grass seed.

Stage	Care that matters
Sowing to germination	Keep the surface evenly damp with light watering. Check several times daily in drying weather. Add water only as needed, with no puddles or seed movement.
Seedlings visible	Continue watching the slowest species in a mix. Gradually lengthen watering and reduce frequency as roots develop. Do not let tiny seedlings wilt.
First mowing	Mow when new grass is about one-third taller than its target cut height and is rooted firmly enough to stay in place. Use a sharp, light mower on firm soil.
After several cuts	Return toward the normal species height and an established-lawn watering pattern. Keep heavy use off the area until it has filled in.

Grass	Typical germination in suitable conditions
Kentucky bluegrass	14-21 days. Keep watching slower seedlings in mixed seed.
Turf-type tall fescue	7-14 days.
Fine fescues	7-14 days, with differences among species.
Perennial ryegrass	5-10 days. Fast green cover is still young turf.

A measured seed example: If the label specifies 5 lb per 1,000 sq ft for overseeding, a 200 sq ft patch needs 1 lb of that product. This is arithmetic, not a universal seed rate. Coatings and species change the amount.

Sources: 3, 6, 7 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.



Spread a weighed amount over measured turf. Keep fertilizer off paving and out of drainage routes.

Cool-season lawns

Fall is the main feeding season for many cool-season lawns. Use your regional nitrogen schedule and account for fertilizer already applied this year. A common single-application range is 0.5-1 lb of actual nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft, but local limits and suitable rates can be lower. Fine fescues usually need less annual nitrogen than bluegrass or tall fescue.

Warm-season lawns

As Bermuda, Zoysia and St. Augustine slow for winter, stop routine nitrogen at the locally recommended cutoff. Do not apply a cool-season fall program to these grasses. In frost-free areas where growth continues, use a local year-round schedule with smaller demand-based inputs.

- 1 Read the soil report.** Use it for pH, phosphorus and potassium decisions. Add lime or sulfur only at the stated rate. Neither is a routine annual fall treatment.
- 2 Read the whole fertilizer label.** The first number is nitrogen. Check the release type, application rate and watering directions. Cold soil can slow the release of some products.
- 3 Pick a suitable day.** Use firm ground and dry foliage when the label calls for it. Avoid frozen or saturated soil, drought-stressed turf, strong wind and heavy rain forecasts.
- 4 Finish cleanly.** Sweep stray granules back onto turf. Water in if directed, without runoff. Record the product, date, area and actual nitrogen applied.

A bag marked “winterizer” does not prove a lawn needs it. Extra potassium has little value when the soil already supplies enough. Newly seeded areas need a seedling-safe fertility plan without overlapping full fertilizer doses.

Sources: 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

TASK 3 / MEASURED APPLICATION

Calculate the dose before filling the hopper

Fertilizer weight and nitrogen weight are different. A 20-0-10 product contains 20% nitrogen by weight. The other numbers refer to phosphate and potash equivalents. The example below uses an illustrative rate that must fit your lawn's local program and the label.

Worked example: a 2,000 sq ft lawn

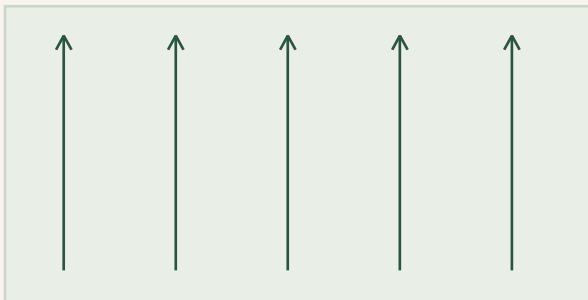
Target: 0.5 lb nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft.

Nitrogen needed: $2,000 / 1,000 \times 0.5 = 1 \text{ lb nitrogen}$.

Product needed with 20% nitrogen: $1 / 0.20 = 5 \text{ lb fertilizer}$.

That is about 2.27 kg of product for 186 sq m.

PASS 1: HALF THE TOTAL



PASS 2: REMAINING HALF



Close the gate while turning. Count border passes within the total.

Figure 5. Two crossing passes can improve coverage when the spreader is calibrated to deliver half the total in each pass. Do not make two full-rate passes.

- 1 **Check the spread width.** Use the manufacturer's effective swath width and recommended overlap. A bag setting is a starting point, not a measured dose.
- 2 **Calibrate over a known area.** For the example above, a 1,000 sq ft test area should use 2.5 lb of product. Weigh the hopper load and the remainder to find what was applied.
- 3 **Keep the walking pace steady.** Open the gate after starting and close it before stopping. For crossing passes, verify the half-rate setting with a measured test.
- 4 **Account for everything.** Subtract any fertilizer used for the test or perimeter from the amount left for that area. Never keep spreading just to empty the bag.

Useful conversion: 1 lb nitrogen per 1,000 sq ft is about 4.9 g nitrogen per sq m. The example rate of 0.5 lb is about 2.4 g per sq m.

TASK 4 / LEAVES & DEBRIS



Move heavy leaf falls off turf before the wetting, settle into a wet mat, keep piles beside the lawn rather than on it.

- 1 Collect hard debris first.** Pick up branches, stones, toys, fallen fruit and pet waste before mowing. Check for hidden objects under leaves.
- 2 Munch a light, dry covering.** Use a suitable mower to chop leaves into small pieces. Take a second pass only if needed. The pieces should settle between grass blades with turf still visible.
- 3 Remove the excess.** If leaves clump, hide the grass or remain as a blanket after mowing, rake or collect them. Wet leaves are usually easier to lift once they have drained or dried.
- 4 Put the leaves to work elsewhere.** Move whole leaves into suitable beds or make a leaf-mold pile. Shredded leaves can join a compost mix. Keep mulch off plant crowns and away from tree trunks.
- 5 Protect fresh seedlings.** Use a light leaf rake carefully or move leaves with a gentle blower setting. Avoid dragging heavy piles or wheels across the repair.

A quick visual test

After cleanup, look down into the lawn. You should see grass throughout the area, with no matted layer pressing on it. Repeat short cleanup sessions during heavy leaf fall instead of leaving one large job until winter.

Keep leaves and grass clippings out of gutters, streets and storm drains. Leaf piles in suitable beds can shelter insects, so leave some whole leaves away from the turf where they will not smother plants.

Sources: 2 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.



Check the height of the cut grass and the soil. The number on a mower lever is not always the cutting height. Continue mowing while the lawn grows, with longer gaps between cuts as growth slows. These are useful home-lawn ranges. Cultivar, shade, mower type and local guidance may change the setting.

Grass	Typical maintained height	Fall adjustment
Kentucky bluegrass	2.5-3.5 in (6-9 cm)	Stay in range. Avoid a close final cut.
Turf-type tall fescue	3-4 in (8-10 cm)	Use about 3 in for many fall lawns. Retain more leaf in shade.
Fine fescues, mown lawns	2.5-4 in (6-10 cm)	Mow only as needed. Low-mow plantings have a separate routine.
Perennial ryegrass	2.5-3.5 in (6-9 cm)	Use a sharp blade to avoid shredded tips.
Bermuda, typical home lawn	1-2.5 in (2.5-6 cm)	Some regions advise raising about 1/2 in before frost, within the cultivar's range.
Zoysia	1-2.5 in (2.5-6 cm)	A slight rise as nights cool can leave more leaf. Avoid scalping.
St. Augustine, standard types	3.5-4 in (9-10 cm)	Keep its taller cut. Do not use a Bermuda setting.
St. Augustine, dwarf types	2-2.5 in (5-6 cm)	Confirm the cultivar before using this lower range.

Lower-cut Bermuda and fine-textured Zoysia cultivars can require a reel mower and a level surface. Ask the turf supplier for the cultivar's setting. Heights on this page describe established turf, not a seedbed preparation cut.

Sources: 5, 8, 9, 12 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

TASK 5 / TECHNIQUE & FINAL CUT

Cut less at each visit

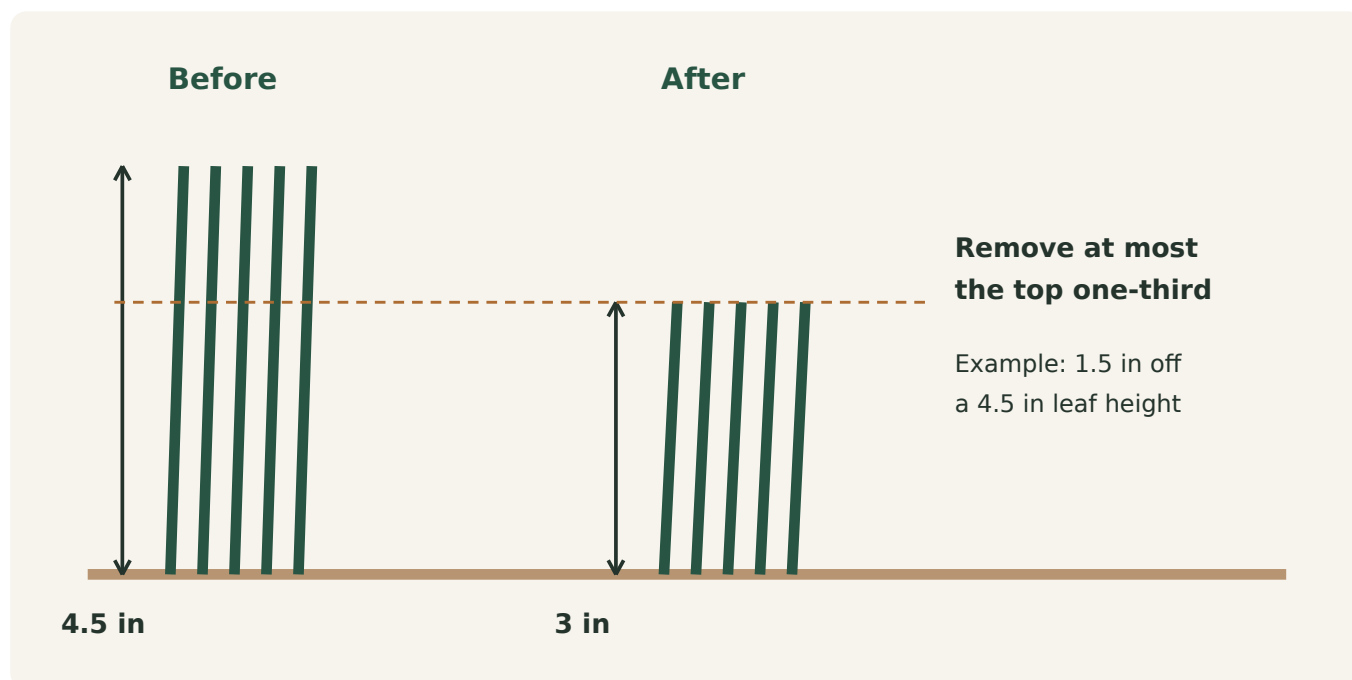


Figure 6. The one-third rule. A 3 in target height means mowing before the grass gets much above 4.5 in. The same proportion applies to other heights.

- 1 **Measure a few places.** Place a ruler at the soil surface, not on top of the thatch or leaves. Check both high and low ground after a test strip.
- 2 **Take off no more than one-third.** If growth is too tall, raise the deck and lower it over later cuts. Do not remove half the leaf simply to return to a preferred setting.
- 3 **Mow on firm ground.** Wait for frost to thaw and soft soil to drain. Change mowing direction between visits to reduce ruts.
- 4 **Leave fine clippings.** Spread any clumps before they smother the grass. Sharpen a blade that leaves frayed pale tips. Disconnect the power source before maintenance.
- 5 **Make the last cut when it is needed.** Stop when growth stops. Keep the lawn within its recommended range rather than giving every species a short winter haircut.

Where snow mold has been a problem

Some local cool-season programs recommend a modestly lower final cut, still within the species range. Reduce height gradually and follow local advice. Do not apply that practice to tall-cut St. Augustine.



- 1 **Check the soil first.** Look for signs of several inches below the surface. Folded leaves, a blue-gray cast or persistent footprints can signal water stress in actively growing grass.
- 2 **Use an active-growth starting point.** About 1 in (25 mm) of total water per week is a common benchmark for many lawns in active growth. Cool fall weather often needs much less. Use rainfall, soil moisture and turf response to adjust.
- 3 **Reach the root zone.** Apply enough to moisten the rooted soil, commonly the upper 4-6 in (10-15 cm). Probe after watering to check the actual wetting depth. Shallow soil and sand need smaller doses.
- 4 **Water in the morning.** Adjust sprinklers to keep water on turf. Stop before runoff and split the dose into short cycles if clay or slopes absorb water slowly.
- 5 **Lengthen the interval as demand falls.** Switch off automatic summer schedules. A dormant lawn may still need occasional water during a prolonged dry spell if the ground is thawed and can absorb it.

New seed follows a different schedule

The light, frequent watering used for germination is temporary. Follow page 9 while seedlings establish, then move gradually toward deeper watering with longer gaps.

Warm-season dormancy does not mean roots can survive unlimited dryness. Check exposed slopes and sandy spots during dry winters. Never irrigate frozen or saturated soil. Observe local watering restrictions.

Sources: 8, 12, 13, 14 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

TASK 6 / WATERING CALCULATION

Measure your sprinkler output

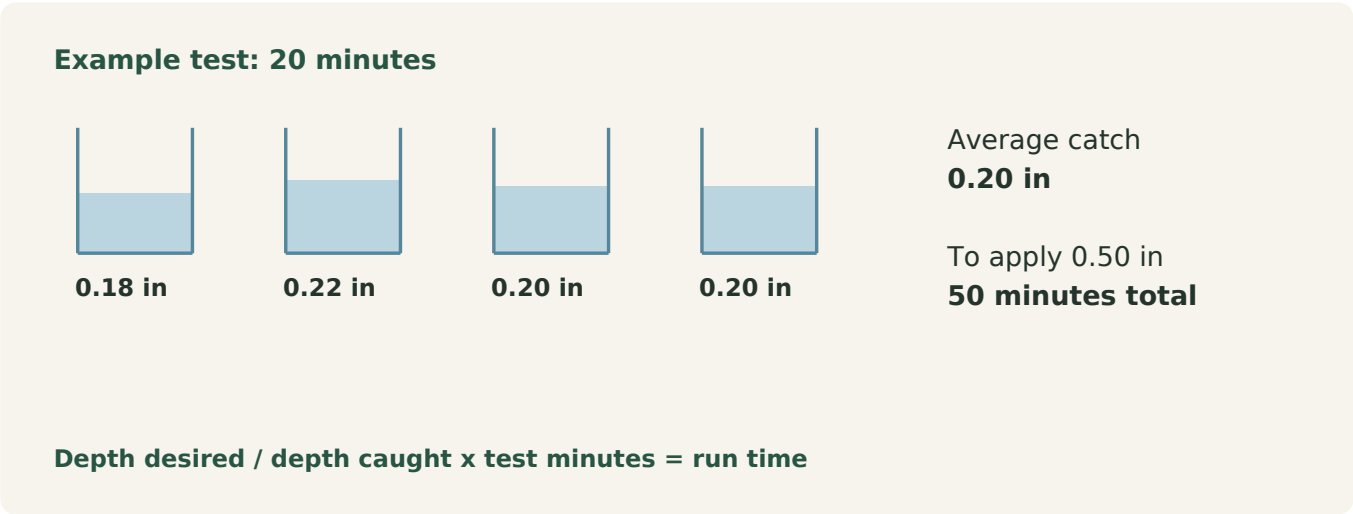


Figure 7. Four illustrated cans show the calculation. For a practical check, spread at least 6-10 identical straight-sided cans across the watered area. A formal audit uses more.

- 1

Run a timed test. Choose a calm morning. Put cans in both nearby and distant areas of the sprinkler pattern. Run for 20 minutes, or long enough to measure accurately without overflow or runoff.
- 2

Measure each depth. Add the depths and divide by the number of cans. For the drawing: $(0.18 + 0.22 + 0.20 + 0.20) / 4 = 0.20$ in.
- 3

Calculate a suitable run time. If the soil needs 0.50 in, use $0.50 / 0.20 \times 20 = 50$ minutes. The target depth is your decision based on the lawn, not a fixed weekly requirement.
- 4

Split the total if needed. If runoff starts after 10 minutes, use shorter cycles with soaking time between them. Keep the same measured total only if the root zone still needs it.
- 5

Fix uneven coverage. Large differences among cans point to poor overlap, blocked nozzles, leaks or wind. Adjust the system before adding time that would overwater wetter spots.

A weekly example	Amount
Chosen active-growth target	1.00 in total
Useful measured rain	0.60 in
Possible irrigation shortfall	0.40 in, only if the soil needs it

Repeat the check for each irrigation zone. A lawn with sandy soil, a shaded strip and an exposed slope may need separate watering decisions.

Sources: 14, 15 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

COOL-SEASON CARE PLANS

Kentucky bluegrass & perennial ryegrass

Kentucky bluegrass

Bluegrass spreads through underground stems and can fill small gaps when growing well. A badly thinned lawn still needs repair, especially if compaction or pests damaged the roots. Give new seed an early start because germination is slower than perennial ryegrass.

Fall job	Bluegrass approach
Aeration	Core-aerate compacted areas during early fall growth. Check thatch before assuming soil hardness is the only problem.
Bare patches	Use suitable bluegrass cultivars or a locally recommended mix. Keep the seedbed moist through the full germination period.
Feeding	Follow the local annual nitrogen plan. Account for spring and summer applications before deciding on one or more fall feeds.
Mowing and water	Maintain about 2.5-3.5 in. Reduce irrigation with cooler weather while protecting seedlings and dry root zones.

Perennial ryegrass

Perennial ryegrass establishes quickly but grows mainly in bunches. Thin places may remain open without new seed. It is useful in suitable regional mixes, though disease pressure can make it a poor choice as the sole grass in some humid transition-zone climates.

Fall job	Ryegrass approach
Aeration and seeding	Relieve compaction first if needed, then seed thin patches in the early fall repair window. Quick germination does not remove the need for establishment time.
Feeding	Use a regional cool-season program. Avoid excessive nitrogen that produces soft growth or increases disease pressure.
Mowing and water	Keep about 2.5-3.5 in with a sharp blade. Watch new growth closely as watering frequency is reduced.

For both grasses

Keep leaf mats off the lawn. Avoid heavy traffic on new, frosted or saturated turf. Permanent perennial ryegrass lawns are different from temporary winter ryegrass planted into dormant Bermuda.

Sources: 1, 3, 5, 6 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

COOL-SEASON CARE PLANS

Fescue needs a closer look

“Fescue” includes grasses with different care needs. Tall fescue has broader leaves and often deeper roots. Fine fescues have narrow, threadlike leaves and usually need less feeding. Check the original seed label or have a turf sample identified before setting the plan.

Turf-type tall fescue

- 1 **Repair open patches.** Tall fescue mainly forms clumps and does not quickly knit across large gaps. Overseed early in fall with turf-type cultivars suited to your area.
- 2 **Open compacted ground.** Core-aerate while it is growing. A deep-rooting grass still struggles if compacted soil blocks its roots.
- 3 **Keep a useful height.** Maintain roughly 3-4 in, with about 3 in suitable for many fall lawns. Avoid scalping to prepare for winter.
- 4 **Feed within the annual plan.** Fall feeding often supports recovery. Choose the rate and number of applications from local guidance, prior feeding and lawn condition.
- 5 **Separate seedlings from mature turf.** Water a new patch lightly as needed, then reduce frequency as it roots. Established deep roots can use moisture below a dry surface.

Fine fescues

Chewings, hard, sheep and creeping red fescues suit lower-input lawns where locally adapted. Some handle partial shade well, but no lawn grass solves dense shade or constant foot traffic. Keep a mown fine-fescue lawn around 2.5-4 in, or follow the routine for a designed low-mow planting.

Use a lighter fertility program than for a hungry bluegrass lawn. One modest fall application may be enough, and a healthy low-input lawn may need none that season. Avoid feeding just to match the darker color of a different grass. Seed worn areas early and keep leaves from burying the narrow foliage.

A recurring bare strip under trees

Check shade and root competition. Expand a mulched bed or use a suitable groundcover if grass repeatedly fails. Repeated seeding cannot supply missing light.

WARM-SEASON CARE PLANS

Bermuda & Zoysia: leave time to recover

These grasses spread well in warm weather and often turn tan after cold arrives. Their fall program should protect existing turf as growth slows. Major soil work and repairs belong in the next strong growing period.

Fall job	Bermuda	Zoysia
Aeration	Record compacted places and aerate after full green-up in late spring or early summer.	Defer aeration and heavy dethatching until active warm-season growth.
Thin or bare areas	Match the cultivar. Many hybrids require sod, plugs or sprigs. Some seeded types can be repaired with matching seed in warm weather.	Sod or matching plugs are common repair choices. Some cultivars can be seeded. Establish during warm weather.
Nitrogen	End feeding at the regional cutoff before dormancy. Do not chase winter color with extra nitrogen.	Avoid a late nitrogen push. Use the local low-to-moderate fertility program.
Mowing	Most home lawns sit near 1-2.5 in. A small pre-frost increase may be advised locally.	Common range is 1-2.5 in. A slight fall rise may leave more leaf without creating a tall mat.
Water and leaves	Reduce irrigation frequency. Check dry soil during long rainless spells. Clear mats gently.	Monitor dryness and leaf cover. Avoid unnecessary traffic on dormant turf.

Winter overseeding is an extra management choice

Sowing ryegrass into Bermuda for winter color adds water, mowing and fertilizer demands, and can delay Bermuda's spring return. It does not repair the Bermuda underneath. Skip it for a simpler home-lawn plan unless local advice and your maintenance goals support it. Routine winter ryegrass overseeding is a poor fit for Zoysia.

Do not mistake dormancy for a repair emergency

A fairly uniform tan lawn after cold weather may be healthy dormant turf. Mark irregular dead areas for spring inspection. Widespread color loss before neighboring turf slows deserves diagnosis now.

Sources: 8, 9 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

WARM-SEASON CARE PLAN

St. Augustine: keep the taller cut

St. Augustine spreads by above-ground runners. Standard cultivars need more leaf height than Bermuda, and close mowing can leave the lawn weak. Identify any dwarf cultivar before choosing a lower setting.

Fall job	St. Augustine approach
Aeration	Plan for late spring or early summer during strong growth. Avoid disruptive fall work as the grass slows.
Bare patches	Use matching sod or plugs. St. Augustine is not normally established from commercial lawn seed. Defer major repair until warm growth returns.
Feeding	Follow local timing. Stop when growth subsides. Tropical or frost-free lawns may need a different year-round program.
Mowing	Standard types: 3.5-4 in. Dwarf types: commonly 2-2.5 in. Confirm the named cultivar.
Water and leaves	Water only when needed and avoid prolonged wetness. Lift heavy leaves without tearing runners.
Watch for disease	Expanding yellow or brown patches in cool, wet weather may be large patch. Seek a diagnosis before adding fertilizer or treatment.

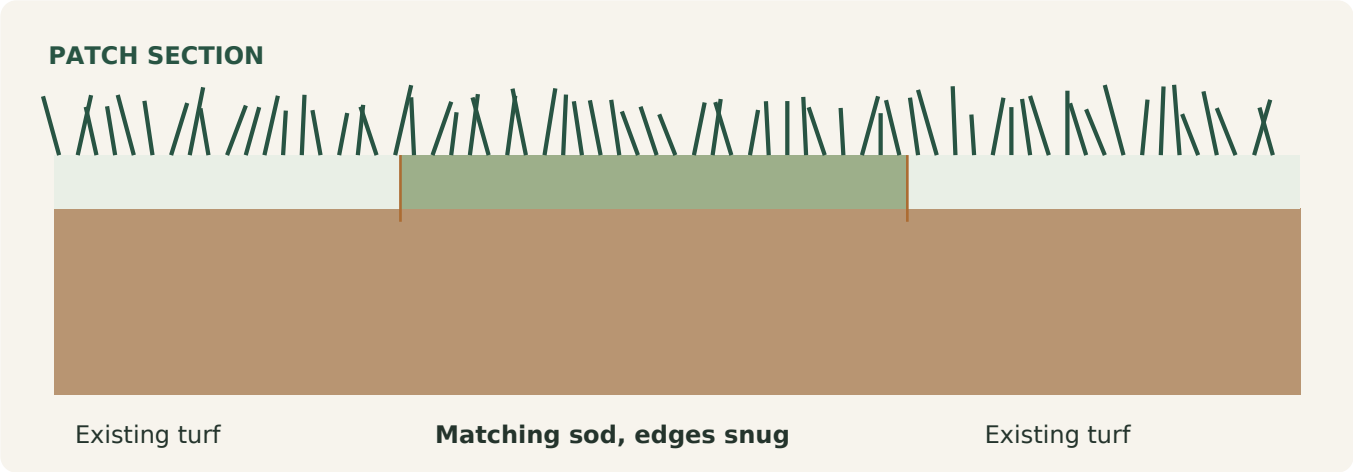


Figure 8. A sod repair sits level with surrounding turf. Prepare the soil so the top of the new sod matches the existing surface.

When the warm repair season arrives, remove failed turf, loosen and level the soil, fit matching sod with snug edges and press for good contact. Water promptly and keep the sod's soil layer moist as roots attach, then reduce frequency. Delay traffic and mowing until firmly rooted. Use the supplier's establishment instructions.

Routine ryegrass overseeding is unsuitable for St. Augustine. It can interfere with its growth and spring recovery.

Sources: 10, 12 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Diagnose a weak patch before treating it

Brown grass is a symptom. Compare the damaged area with a healthy spot, check soil moisture and inspect the roots before choosing a remedy. Keep a dated photo so you can see whether the patch is spreading.

What you notice	Check first	Useful next step
Thin turf beside a gate or shortcut	Hard soil, flattened grass and repeat traffic	Reroute traffic. Aerate in the correct growing season, then repair.
Puddles after modest rain	Blocked drainage, downspout discharge or a low spot	Correct the water source or grade. Reconsider turf where drainage cannot be fixed.
Dry patch beside healthy turf	Sprinkler coverage and soil moisture below the surface	Run a catch-can test. Check for buried debris or shallow soil.
Loose turf with damaged roots	Grubs, root disease or other root loss	Lift a small section at the patch edge. Get pests identified and use local treatment thresholds.
Expanding rings in Zoysia or St. Augustine	Cool, wet conditions, thatch and past large patch	Reduce excess moisture. Seek a diagnosis and a local disease plan.
A pale or rusty cast after mowing	Torn tips and a dull blade	Sharpen or replace the blade safely. Review the cutting height.
Moss or repeated failure in shade	Light, drainage, compaction and soil test results	Address the site. Lime only if the soil test calls for it.
Uniform warm-season browning after frost	Timing and condition of crowns and runners	Allow dormancy. Keep the lawn clear and monitor winter dryness.

Weeds and pest products need a separate decision

Hand-remove small weed patches before they seed. If a treatment is warranted, identify the weed or pest and choose a product labeled for your grass and use site. Check reseeding intervals and temperature restrictions. A fall pre-emergent aimed at winter weeds can prevent the lawn seed you planned to sow.

Routine insecticide or fungicide applications are not part of this checklist. A lawn with a confirmed, recurring disease may need a timed preventive plan from local extension guidance.

Sources: 2, 8, 9, 10, 14 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

WINTER READINESS

Prepare for the quiet season

Finish the outdoor jobs

- 1 Clear the surface.** Remove heavy leaf mats, toys, furniture and temporary piles. Keep paths open so winter foot traffic does not create a worn shortcut.
- 2 Mow only while growth calls for it.** Leave the grass within its species range. A last mow may be needed later in a mild autumn, but it is not tied to a fixed date.
- 3 Protect soft and frozen turf.** Avoid traffic when grass is frosted, soil is saturated or the surface is thawing above frozen ground. Repeated pressure can injure crowns and compact soil.
- 4 Manage winter dryness.** Check exposed areas during prolonged dry spells. If roots need water and the soil is thawed, water when it can soak in. Skip irrigation where rainfall keeps the soil moist.
- 5 Keep salt and snow piles off the lawn.** Shovel with the turf edge in mind. Use deicers only as labeled and sweep up residues when practical. Never use fertilizer to melt ice.

Put equipment away ready for spring

Clean the mower and spreader, remove stuck debris and store fertilizer dry in its original labeled bag. Service the mower according to its manual. Disconnect batteries or the ignition source before blade work, and follow the battery maker's storage directions.

Drain hoses and protect outdoor taps before freezing weather. Winterize an in-ground irrigation system according to its design. If it needs compressed-air blowout, use a trained service or the manufacturer's procedure. Too much pressure can damage valves and heads.

Leave a note for spring

Record compaction, bare patches, drainage faults and any suspected disease. Warm-season lawns can look very different once growth returns. Your dated notes will help you decide what actually needs repair.

Sources: 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 14 | Linked reading on pages 27-28.

PRINT & USE / BLUEGRASS, FESCUE & RYEGRASS

Your cool-season fall checklist

Grass or seed mixture: _____

Local fall seeding window: _____

Average first hard freeze: _____

Before the repair window

- ☐ Identify the dominant grass and any fine-fescue areas needing lighter feeding.
- ☐ Measure turf area and take a soil test if one is due.
- ☐ Map bare spots, hard ground, shade and irrigation problems.
- ☐ Check recent herbicide labels before buying seed.

During active early fall growth

- ☐ Fix the cause of recurring weak patches.
- ☐ Core-aerate only where compaction or seedbed preparation warrants it.
- ☐ Prepare thin areas and sow measured seed early enough to establish.
- ☐ Keep the seedbed moist, then reduce watering frequency as roots develop.
- ☐ Apply fertilizer only within the local annual plan and any application limits.

Through leaf fall and slowing growth

- ☐ Keep the mower within the species height range and follow the one-third rule.
- ☐ Mulch light leaf falls or remove heavy mats. Protect new seedlings.
- ☐ Measure rain and water only when the root zone needs it.
- ☐ Keep heavy use off frosted, soft or newly seeded turf.
- ☐ Finish equipment and irrigation-system winter preparation.

Grass-specific reminder

Bluegrass: allow extra germination time. Tall fescue and ryegrass: patch open gaps. Fine fescue: avoid copying a heavier bluegrass feeding program.

PRINT & USE / BERMUDA, ZOYSIA & ST. AUGUSTINE

Your warm-season fall checklist

Grass and cultivar: _____

Local final nitrogen timing: _____

Typical first frost, if any: _____

While the grass is still growing

- ☐ Confirm the mowing range for the named cultivar.
- ☐ Review this year's fertilizer use and the local nitrogen cutoff.
- ☐ Check soil-test advice before adding potassium, lime or other amendments.
- ☐ Photograph damaged areas and diagnose active disease or pest injury.

As growth slows

- ☐ Defer routine aeration and heavy dethatching until the next active warm season.
- ☐ Plan matching sod, plugs or suitable seed for future repairs.
- ☐ Avoid overseeding for winter color unless a local plan supports the extra work.
- ☐ Reduce irrigation frequency using rainfall and root-zone moisture.
- ☐ Continue mowing only as required. Avoid scalping.
- ☐ Remove heavy leaves gently, especially around St. Augustine runners.

During dormancy or the cooler season

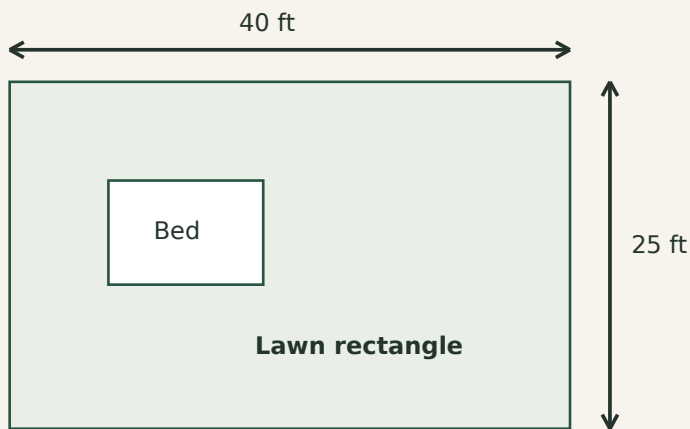
- ☐ Check exposed dry spots during long rainless periods.
- ☐ Keep vehicles, repeated foot traffic and stored objects off resting turf.
- ☐ Record spring repair jobs and protect irrigation equipment from freezes.

Frost-free lawn reminder

If your lawn stays in active growth, use the local year-round care schedule. Winter browning, stopping dates and irrigation needs differ from those in colder regions.

REUSABLE WORKSHEET

Measure and plan your own lawn

**Example**

$40 \times 25 = 1,000$ sq ft
 Subtract a 10×5 ft bed.

Net lawn = 950 sq ft

Figure 9. Calculate only the area you will treat. Rectangle: length x width. Triangle: base x height / 2.

Area	Length	Width	Net turf area
Front lawn			
Back lawn			
Side strip			
Subtract beds / paving			
TOTAL			

Set the amount before you start

Seed label rate: _____ lb per 1,000 sq ft

Area to sow: _____ sq ft

Seed needed = area / 1,000 x label rate = _____ lb

Approved nitrogen rate: _____ lb per 1,000 sq ft

Turf area: _____ sq ft

Nitrogen needed = area / 1,000 x nitrogen rate = _____ lb

First number on fertilizer label: _____ % nitrogen

Product needed = nitrogen needed / (label % / 100) = _____ lb

Metric conversions

1 in = 2.54 cm. 1 ft = 0.3048 m. 1,000 sq ft = 92.9 sq m.

1 lb = 0.454 kg. 1 in of rain or irrigation = 25.4 mm.

REUSABLE WORKSHEET

Keep a record you can use next fall

Write down what the lawn received, not just the name of the job. Next year you can compare results without guessing which treatment helped.

Date / area	Work or product	Measured amount	Result / next step

Rainfall and watering notes

Week	Rain	Irrigation	Soil / lawn response

Local details to check

Extension office or adviser: _____

Grass cultivar or seed mix: _____

Fertilizer or watering restrictions: _____

Next soil-test date: _____

The next useful job

REFERENCES / 1 OF 2

Source reading & local guidance

The linked university extension publications support the guidance in this booklet. Their calendars reflect particular climates. Use the growing-stage advice here alongside the current recommendations for your own location.

1. University of Minnesota Extension

[Lawn care calendar](#)

Cool-season growth and the relationship between weather and seasonal work.

2. University of Maryland Extension

[Lawn Maintenance Calendar](#)

Seasonal care, leaf handling and the differences between tall and fine fescue.

3. University of Maryland Extension

[Lawn Grasses Grown in Maryland](#)

Growth habits, germination times and grass selection.

4. University of Maryland Extension

[Soil Testing and Soil Testing Labs](#)

Representative soil sampling and the limits of soil nitrogen testing.

5. University of Maryland Extension

[Maintaining an Established Lawn](#)

Compaction, core aeration, mowing and lawn maintenance.

6. University of Minnesota Extension

[Renovating a lawn for quality and sustainability](#)

Seedbed preparation, sowing and seedling aftercare.

7. NC State Extension

[Tall Fescue Lawn Maintenance Calendar](#)

Regional timing for tall fescue repair and maintenance.

8. NC State Extension

[Bermudagrass Lawn Maintenance Calendar](#)

Bermuda growth, repair methods, mowing and seasonal care.

When advice differs between regions

Use the recommendation closest to your climate, soil and named grass cultivar. Fertilizer rates and timing must also fit the current product label and local restrictions.

REFERENCES / 2 OF 2

Keep the guide beside your lawn notes

9. Clemson Cooperative Extension

[Zoysiagrass Yearly Maintenance Program](#)

Zoysia mowing, dormancy, thatch and fall care.

10. NC State Extension

[St. Augustinegrass Lawn Maintenance Calendar](#)

Seasonal aeration timing and recognition of fall disease risk.

11. University of Minnesota Extension

[Fertilizing lawns](#)

Fertilizer analysis, nitrogen budgeting and soil-test use for P and K.

12. University of Florida IFAS Extension

[St. Augustinegrass for Florida Lawns](#)

Standard and dwarf mowing heights, watering and regional growth differences.

13. University of Minnesota Extension

[Water-saving strategies for home lawns](#)

Weather-based watering and checking the rooted soil.

14. Colorado State University Extension

[Lawn Care Basics](#)

Root-zone wetting, soil texture, cycle watering and winter dryness.

15. University of Minnesota Extension

[Auditing home lawn irrigation systems](#)

Catch-can testing and irrigation run-time calculations.

About the illustrations

Illustrations made for this guide depict home lawn-care tasks.

The original technical diagrams are schematic and are not drawn to scale. Use the written measurements and product instructions for the work.

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