

TURF TIPS

The Turf Care Newsletter of Prestige Shrub and Tree, Ltd.®
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This is your first turf care visit for 2010. We will be applying potassium, pre-emergent and post-emergent weed control, as well as additives to increase the ability of the soil to absorb water more efficiently to both the warm season and fescue turf. Fescue lawns will also receive additional **slow release nitrogen** fertilizer during this visit to encourage continued root development and top growth. Warm season turf will receive additional fertilizer next visit to aid the turf as it begins to break its winter semi-dormancy.

What a difference a year makes. The rainfall amounts have been higher than normal for fall and winter and we start the year with Lake Lanier at full pool with the Corp of Engineers needing to drop the level! The predictions are for a wet, cold winter and so far the forecasters have been correct. Time will tell if we continue the trend.

Our turf program is based on proven technology and a proven track record of twenty-five years of constant improvements. Over the years we have dealt with numerous scenarios from drought situations to excessively rainy periods where we thought we might see the animals lining up two by two!

The consequence is our experience gained in the Atlanta area over these many years. These

constantly changing scenarios means we must use our experience to constantly adapt and improve. Our program is not based on “just tossing out some fertilizer” but it is a well balanced system designed to keep your turf healthy as possible under all conditions.

We expect to see more disease activity this year in the warm season turf including Fairy Ring and Winter Patch. We will be addressing these problems as needed.

Warm Season Turf

Your warm season turf shouldn't need anything other than our applications until mid-March when it will be time to scalp and aerate. You will receive your aeration letter in early March. Be sure to call in your request for aeration before the deadline.

Remember, **do not use pure sand** if you are going to be topdressing your turf this year. A soil mixture with just a little sand is much better and will not increase compaction.

Be sure to get your lawn mowers tuned up and blades sharpened in early March so you can beat the spring rush and be ready to go on time.

Fescue Growth Slows During Winter

Fescue does build root systems and store carbohydrates (energy) over winter when soil and air temperatures allow but even fescue slows its growth when temperatures are cold. Its root system and cells are actually growing and functioning but as with green up you will see very little, if any, **visible top growth** until we get the crucial factors of consistently warmer weather, consistently warmer soil temperatures, increased day length and consistent rainfall or irrigation.

After successive days of very cold weather the fescue will appear very thin and off color but recovers as soil temperatures rise. Fescue in heavily shaded conditions look worse compared to fescue lawns that receive more sun since temperatures are colder in the shady areas.

As the fescue begins to grow again any thin or patchy areas that really stand out now will become less noticeable.

Fescue Color Loss Normal For Winter

Many folks become fixated on the lack of deep green color in their fescue turf this time of year. If you are just waiting for the switch to turn on and the fescue to become instantly green you are missing the point.

Once the fertilizer moves into the soil the plant can begin

uptake. The record rainfall levels last fall were of course accompanied by cloud cover which reduces growth by restricting photosynthesis and nutrient uptake slows. These conditions can result in off color turf.

Also during cold weather and short winter days, though there is nutrient uptake, the nitrogen in the fertilizer is not utilized as efficiently by photosynthesis thus you usually will not see the deep green color until day length increases and we get consistently warmer weather, consistently warmer soil temperatures, consistent rainfall or irrigation to continue to move the fertilizer into the root zone. The simple fact that fertilizer was applied to the soil is only one small part of the system.

The over winter color anomalies are normal and the turf will recover. In all cases patience is the watch word for turf green up, whether it be fescue or warm season turf. In some years, conditions support early green up while most years we simply have to wait until soil conditions warrant growth and development.

Winter Weed Levels Are Very High This Year

Chickweed is the dominant winter weed again this year but we are seeing more ground ivy and veronica than usual. This not a major concern and we treat for these and all weeds during our initial visits until the summer temperatures preclude herbicide application.

One weed that we predict will become more of a nuisance is Mallow. This weed is becoming more of a problem in fescue turf

and we aggressively treat it when we do find it.

Many of these weeds can be spread by lawn mowers. If you have a mowing service they need to be sure they thoroughly clean their equipment before they mow your turf to reduce the possibility of spreading these hard to control weeds.

If you see weeds in your warm season turf, **do not** use Round-up® or Finale® to spot treat. Regardless of what you read or hear, even dilute solutions of these chemicals can kill your turf even if applied during the winter, especially during a mild winter. We remove winter weeds with herbicides that specifically target the weeds we encounter on your lawn.

One weed we cannot remove from fescue is *Poa annua* or annual bluegrass. This little weed is easily identified by its white seed heads. We are finding that we are encountering the development of possible resistance to pre-emergent herbicides with *Poa*.

If a weed develops resistance to herbicides it becomes extremely difficult to control. We are looking to the universities to determine if we do indeed have resistance developing and what we can do to deal with the issue. Until then we **can** treat *Poa annua* in warm season turf after it emerges. Thankfully, *Poa annua* is naturally controlled by the hotter temperatures we receive in late spring and dies off by late May or early June.

Two additional weeds that are troublesome in fescue are *Poa trivialis* and bentgrass. These are also cool season grassy weeds that invade our fescue lawns and are

very persistent. These grasses are used in some areas as golf turf. The theory is that these grass contaminants are either in our fescue seed or are being spread by bird activity.

Current research indicates that our seed testing system may not be accurate enough to pick up these contaminants. The upshot is that we have to deal with them the best we can.

These grasses are not prevented by pre-emergent herbicides, cannot be selectively killed and unfortunately, they do not die out as temperatures increase in the summer but begin to brown up severely, mimicking disease activity.

If left to grow in the turf they eventually can overrun the fescue and prevent effective seeding in the fall due to their heavily matted root system. These grasses must be removed in the fall, just prior to seeding. The preferred method is to kill these areas with Round-up®, remove the dead plants and debris and reseed. It normally takes a couple years for these areas to recover to the point of completely blending in with the older fescue lawn and in our experience the *Poa trivialis* may return again from residual root system in two to three years even after the Round-up® treatment.