

TURF TIPS

The Turf Care Newsletter of Prestige Shrub and Tree, Ltd.®
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This is your third scheduled visit for the year. In this visit, the fescue will be getting weed control measures to help reduce any lingering weeds in the turf. As we move into May, the fescue will receive a systemic fungicide for brown patch reduction. The zoysia turf will receive its season long green up fertilizer designed to help bring the turf out of winter dormancy and feed it throughout the growing season. If we find incidence of spring warm season turf diseases, we will spot treat the disease activity during this visit. If additional fungicide treatments are needed, they must be done at additional cost and we can provide a quote to upgrade you to our 8 visit program that includes a fungicide in the spring to help mitigate disease issues. Finally, as temperatures permit, we will also be applying weed control on all turf types.

Poor Cultural Methods Lead To Turf Problems

Now that it's about time to start mowing your turf, there are some guidelines to keep in mind. Mowing your warm season turf short is acceptable as long as you keep these things in mind. Fescue turf should not be mowed lower than 3". Keeping the fescue mowed at the same height as warm season turf (2-2.5") will stress it out, lead to more disease issues and increase die off in the summer.

Warm season lawns mowed short, whether reel or rotary mowed, tend to crawl more but the root system remains shallow. Lawns that have root injury must be mowed higher to allow the roots to recover and rebuild. During recovery from root damage, it is essential that you promote and en-

courage deeper root systems. If the root systems are not allowed to recover, you will see extensive damage during periods of high temperatures unless you are watering correctly but even then you may incur additional root damage. Once the weakened roots become severely dry, you get root death without a chance of recovery. Mow higher until the turf fully recovers, which can take a year.

As you move into August, warm season mowing heights must be raised well before the first frost to allow the turf to increase its top growth and produce food for storage in the roots and to build new roots. Without this recovery period, winter kill or start up problems are not only a possibility but a probability. You may need to insist on this plan of action if your maintenance company does not do this automatically.

If a lawn is **top dressed with sand**, compaction levels increase even more. **Short mowing with a reel mower** will further increase compaction. Root depth becomes shallow because the soil is too compacted for deep root growth and the turf cannot produce adequate food because the leaf blades are so short. Subsequently the turf is not healthy and is more susceptible to winter kill, heat injury and attack by fungal disease pathogens.

Zoysia Not Expected To Fully Green-Up Until Mid To Late May

This is really the norm for each year for Zoysia and this year will be no different. Perception is a tricky beast! Most of us equate March and April with the full onset of Spring-

time. Spring is a time of renewal and the shrubs and trees respond to the early warm temperatures with a profusion of new growth and flower displays. Even with all this effusive shrub and tree growth, you may ask why your Zoysia turf is just poking along. The answer lies in the very complex system at work.

In general, turf needs multiple events to happen simultaneously to really begin its strong spring growth. Day and night time temperatures need to be correct along with soil temperatures and moisture. Day length also needs to be correct. Until all these systems are properly aligned, your turf is just not going to fully green up and take off. Most trees and shrubs are simply less picky about needing ALL the correct conditions and consequently respond to the warm spring air temperatures much more quickly but may also consequently suffer from late season frosts.

So, in actuality, full green up should not be expected until well into May for Zoysia. Trying to push the turf with extra fertilizer only encourages fungal disease which is not good for the turf. The watch word is patience. The turf will green up at its usual pace when ALL the forces of nature properly align!

Rainfall And Irrigation

There is no way to predict what rainfall we will receive in April and May, but traditionally, our weather can get pretty dry. It is important to keep track of the rainfall we receive as rainfall is not cumulative and is not stored in the soil.

If you have not yet brought your irrigation system on line, go ahead

and get it turned on and checked out. Have your irrigation company check the controller, valves and heads and also check for proper coverage. Be sure you do not have irrigation heads buried under soil or blocked by shrubbery that has grown to envelop the irrigation head. Relocate any heads that are now impeded and fix any malfunctioning heads.

Once you perform your annual irrigation maintenance, maintain your **one time per week** irrigation regimen if we are not receiving adequate rain to grow healthy turf. Maintaining the proper regimen when we are not receiving rain helps the turf adjust to the lack of rainfall we usually encounter in April and May.

One inch of irrigation per week is a guideline. If your turf is staying wet then you may not need to water every seven days. Practice “as needed” irrigation and only water when the soil begins to dry. It is usually best to set your irrigation on manual unless you are out of town or have a rain sensor installed so as to minimize over watering.

Springtime Scalping and Aeration in Bermuda

Spring is a great time of year when nature is coming back producing flowers, new leaves and a renewed lawn for the season. This is now the time that owners of Bermuda lawns should be scalping their turf down to remove excess dormant turf from the year before and aerating to open the soil for root growth and soil compaction reduction. This process is important because it causes a growth hormone to be released in the plant telling it to start putting on new growth. Lawns not scalped may see a slower green up as the turf struggles to grow through the dead material. It is also important to note that scalping should be done as low as is possible without hitting dirt. Grass clippings should also be picked up and disposed of so a thatch issue is not created by the layer of clippings. Zoysia lawns should NOT be scalped but dethatched if needed and mowed

only to even out its top growth. Scalping Zoysia too low will cause damage that the turf won't recover from until summer time.

Installing Warm Season Turf

May through the end of August is an optimum time to install warm season turf in our area. Here are some tips and guidelines if you are planning to do some installation.

At last check, there are a mind boggling 186 different varieties of Bermuda being grown in the South. There are fewer zoysia varieties but enough that selecting the correct turf for your growing situation can be confusing.

All warm season turf requires adequate sunlight to thrive. There are more shade tolerant types being grown BUT “shade tolerant” does not mean they do well in shade conditions. The key is all warm season turfs tolerate SOME shade, but all require minimum levels of FULL DIRECT sunlight. Turf with less than these minimum amounts struggle and grow thin. All of these warm season turf types are sodded, not seeded, with two exceptions. Zenith zoysia, a coarser textured zoysia, can be seeded and there is seed derived sod available. There are also hybrid/common seeded bermudas. Centipede is also available as seed or sod. **Due to winter kill tendencies, we do not recommend centipede or any of the common or seeded hybrid turf types.**

Zeon® is the most shade and variable condition tolerant zoysia (Note: this is Zeon® NOT Zenith®) As shade becomes heavier, Zeon tends to thin but usually does not fade completely. In conditions where you have low winter sunlight the turf will tend to melt away and will not recover to any extent until mid July. All the other zoysia types require a minimum of 8 hours full sun or they will thin, languish and in severe shade, may eventually fade away completely.

For full sun conditions, any of the other hybrid bermudas or zoysias are suitable but they all have very different growth characteristics. Before installing any of these turf types visit a property where they are established! Be sure to see the turf in April/May, July/August and then in December to see how they grow and look at different times of the year.

Do not believe all the hype about any of these grasses. Contacting your local extension agent can give you a realistic idea of how any of these turf types will grow in any given situation. They all have limitations and none of them are the end-all-be-all! Keep in mind, we look at turf all day long so feel free to ask us which turf will work in your yard!

Pay Close Attention In May

As we move into May, fescue becomes very susceptible to fungal attack by Rhizoctonia, which causes Brown Patch. For most yards, the included fungicide application will be all that is needed to control the fungal activity. Since the cost of these fungicides continues to rise, consequently, unless you are on our upgraded fescue program, requests for fungicide applications in between our regular applications will be at additional cost.

You can help your turf avoid the need for extra fungicide applications by keeping in mind proper cultural practices which will help reduce the incidence of all diseases. **Watering one time per week at the proper time (between the hours of 10 PM and 5 AM) to get 1” of equivalent rainfall and weekly mowing at the proper height (3” - 4” for fescue and 2” - 2.5” for warm season turf) will help reduce turf stress and disease susceptibility.**