

TURF TIPS

The Turf Care Newsletter of Prestige Shrub and Tree, Ltd.®
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This is your fourth scheduled turf care visit for the year. We will be treating fescue turf and warm season turf for active fungal activity and will also be applying weed control as temperatures allow. Bermuda lawns will also receive more fertilizer that is designed to slowly release through the remainder of the season.

We again had a very heavy crop of *Poa annua* this year. This ever increasing issue is linked to the poa becoming resistant to the current pre-emergent chemicals we have at our disposal. Unfortunately, we cannot rely solely on chemicals to control the growth of poa in our turf. Proper maintenance guidelines must be a part of the equation. Keeping the turf too short into the fall limits the turf's ability to out compete the poa in the spring. Aerating your turf at least 1 time per year will help manage the soil compaction. If you are reel mowing, aeration should be done 2-3 times per year due to the heavy reel mowers and the increased mowing frequency. Keeping the mowers clean can also help cut down on the amount of poa seeds that move from yard to yard and mowing with a bag until the poa has died off can limit the amount of seed that is spread by mowing. Doing these things may not guarantee a poa free yard, but it will help keep the turf healthier and in a better position to out compete the poa annua. Again, we do our best to deal with poa each year, but poa control has a lot to do with temperature and maintenance practices not just our chemicals.

As with last spring, we found ourselves in the same position with the zoysias being a bit slow to green up. Every year we receive calls about Zoysia turf not greening up in March or April. This year the roller coaster of cooler temperatures kept the soil temperatures down and warm season turf

will not fully greening up and start growing until soil temperatures warm into the 70s. The spring green up of turf is highly dependent on sun and soil temperatures. Turf green up is not based on a calendar date. Because our spring temperatures were lower than normal, turf growth was greatly reduced until soil temperatures increase and our fertilizer begins to release. The cooler spring temperatures we experienced in April til the end of May did feel good, but remember warm season turf wants consistent temperatures from 80-90 degrees; not temperatures in the 60s and 70s.

There are other factors which can slow spring green up. Location and condition of the turf also governs the full green up time of the turf. Areas that stay wet or shady (or are shadier) will green up slower than areas of full sun due to lower soil temperatures. Areas where thatch is too thick will cause slow green up. If your zoysia has an inconsistent and mottled look, a light raking to remove the excess thatch will help in recovery by opening up the turf and encouraging more vigorous growth. If your initial mowing is too low then it will be slow greening up. Never mow zoysia at start up as low as you mow bermuda. Bermuda lawns require close scalping to promote green up while zoysia can be severely delayed by close scalping.

Mowing Guidelines

- Mow weekly at the minimum.
- If brown streaks appear after you mow then you are getting **firing**. Firing appears in warm season turf after mowing too closely or removing more than one-third of the leaf blade. Firing is not disease related.
- Mowing height for fescue turf should be between 3" and 4". Never mow fescue

below 3" as it will stress the turf out leading to disease and die off.

- Rotary mower mowing height for warm season turf should be between 2" and 2 ½".

Healthy warm season turf usually requires a **five day mowing schedule** during the summer because of the rapid growth rate.

Problems Related To Poor Cultural Practices

Mowing your warm season turf short is acceptable as long as certain guidelines are followed.

Lawns that have root injury must be mowed higher to allow the roots to recover and rebuild. Lawns mowed short, whether reel or rotary mowed, tend to crawl more but the root system remains shallow. During recovery from root damage, it is essential that you promote and encourage deeper root systems. If the root systems are not allowed to recover, you will see extensive damage during periods of high temperatures. 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.

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. This compaction problem may take years to develop but **develop it will**.

If you reel mow your turf there are cultural practices you must follow to reduce problems that are created by

this type of mowing. Even if you are not reel mowing and are using a conventional rotary mower to cut your bermuda or zoysia, it is essential that you **core aerate** your turf **EVERY YEAR!** If you are severely compacted then you may need to aerate 2 or 3 times per year.

Finally, using a reel mower without the appropriate additional cultural practices results in increased disease activity, some of which we have no chemicals we can use to ameliorate the symptoms.

Weekly Mowing and Weed Control Work Hand In Hand!

When the high summer temperatures develop, weed control will be limited to spot treatment of nutgrass, ground ivy and doveweed. The nutgrass management sprays can be done at temperatures up to 90 degrees. For broadleaf weeds, many weed control products have restrictive limitations above 85 degrees.

This is where your **weekly mowing** and dethatching (if necessary) comes into play. **You must mow weekly to control all weeds.** Just because you have had pre-emergent and post-emergent weed controls applied does not necessarily mean you will be weed free. Some weeds, such as tree seedlings, dove weed, ground ivy, fireweed and spurge, are not prevented by the pre-emergent weed control. Post emergent herbicides only damage tree saplings and only moderately affect the fireweed, while the other weeds are very resistant to weed control. Again, weekly mowing is the key to the weed control along with the post emergent weed control.

Summer Turf Disease

Dollar spot always occurs in warm season turf during the summer especially in turf that is stressed due to compaction, improper watering, or reel mowing. In lawns that are properly maintained, dollar spot is much less of a problem.

Our basic program for warm season turf does include fungicide treatments for dollar spot **during your regular visit** but if the fungus reoccurs between visits or if you have recurring diseases such as winter patch, zoysia patch or brown patch, treatment for these dis-

eases is at additional cost. At this time, there is no effective fungicidal control for fairy ring other than cultural modifications you can make to your maintenance program.

For fescue, our basic program does include a systemic fungicide at the beginning of the brown patch season and we spot treat for disease during your regular summer visit. Depending upon the weather and the level of disease activity, additional fungicide may be required between your regular visit.

For those who want additional disease protection, we also have an enhanced fescue and warm season programs which includes additional fungicide and is very effective at reducing zoysia patch, winter patch and brown patch activity. **Your applicator can quote you on the cost for the enhanced program and if you are within our service area for these enhanced programs.**

It is important to remember that applications of chemicals and fertilizer alone cannot correct growth and disease issues if proper cultural techniques are not being utilized.

Watering

Water one time per week to get 1" of irrigation. Above 95 degrees water twice per week delivering a full inch of water at each watering.

Moving into the heat of the summer, our turf lawns need more and more water to stay hydrated. Many times we see irrigation running at inappropriate times or see the evidence of a mismanaged irrigation schedule such as hot spots in the turf or saturated areas of over irrigation. Your main goal when providing water to your turf is to supplement natural rainfall with irrigation so the turf gets its weekly allotment of water needed to maintain growth and plant vigor. Ideally, we would like to see it rain 1 time per week applying 1" of water preferably at night between 10pm and 5am. Unfortunately we don't have control over the rainfall schedule, but this schedule is what we hope to mimic.

Plant systems are designed to pull up moisture from the soil to aid in photosynthesis and plant growth and are at their most efficient as they utilize this

moisture almost to the point of drought stress. In most cases with no rain, this happens to take roughly a week. After this point, the plant starts dehydrating and going into stress from lack of moisture. As the plant starts heading into drought stress it is ready for you to turn on your irrigation and re-hydrate the soil. This is called "watering on demand." Many times we see systems that are set for 3-4 days a week for 15-20 minutes per day. This schedule never allows the water or roots to progress deep into the soil. Many times in our heavy clay soils, it takes at least this long to begin to see the water soaking into the soil. A heavy irrigation of 1" will help work the water deeper into the soil. Your goal here is to irrigate down 6" deep into the soil if you can. Deeper irrigation allows the turf's roots to follow the water down into the soil protecting them from summer heat, excessive wear, and the disease problems caused by weak turf.

Lastly, it is important to adjust the timing of your irrigation to water between 10pm-5am (roughly dew fall). By watering at night you can avoid a heavy loss from evaporation during the day and reduce the hours of leaf wetness thereby minimizing disease (especially in fescue turf). Of course mother nature quite often throws monkey wrenches into our best laid plans by not cooperating, but this is the blueprint and a starting point to follow and fine tune the irrigation of your turf. Be sure to use your rain gauge as a guide to have an accurate account of your rainfall. Some areas may need more or less depending on other factors, but by ensuring the turf is properly hydrated using this outline your turf will have less problems and be healthier overall.