

Bermudagrass

Lawn Maintenance Calendar

The following management practices will help you care for your lawn throughout the year. Location, terrain, soil type and condition, age of the lawn, previous lawn care, and other factors affect turf performance, so adjust these management practices and dates to suit your particular lawn.

March through May

Mowing Mow when the lawn first turns green using a reel mower set at $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inch or a rotary mower set as low as possible without scalping. Be sure to mow before the bermudagrass gets taller than 2 inches. Leave grass clippings on the lawn; they decompose quickly and can provide up to 25 percent of the lawn's fertilizer. If grass clippings are too plentiful, collect and use them as mulch.

Fertilization Apply $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet several weeks after the lawn fully turns green (normally early April or May).

You need to apply $\frac{1}{2}$ pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, but how much fertilizer do you need to buy? Divide 50 by the first number on the fertilizer bag. (The first number always stands for nitrogen.) For example, if you've got a 5-5-15 fertilizer, you divide 50 by 5 and you get 10. That means you need to buy 10 pounds of fertilizer for every 1,000 square feet of lawn.

Watering When bermudagrass is growing, supplement rainfall as needed so that the lawn gets 1 inch of water each week. A bluish-gray appearance or wilted, folded, or curled leaves may indicate that it is time to water. Water until the soil is wet to a depth of 4 to 6 inches (check by probing the soil with a screw driver or similar tool). It takes 3 to 5 hours to properly apply 1 inch of water. If you have sandy soils, you may need to water $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of water every third day. Proper watering helps prevent or reduce problems later in the summer.

Weed Control Apply preemergence herbicides from late February to mid-March. Apply postemergence herbicides in May as needed to control summer annual and perennial broadleaf weeds like as white clover, knotweed, spurge, and lespedeza. Products containing two or three different broadleaf weed herbicides usually control weeds more effectively. Be sure that both types of herbicides are labeled for use on bermudagrass.

Insect Control Check for and control any white grubs. (See *White Grub Control in Turf*, AG-366).

Disease Control As bermudagrass breaks dormancy, Spring Dead Spot may appear as circular patches of tan or brown sunken turf. Patches may be 2 inches to 3 feet in diameter and normally appear on 3- to 5-year-old turf. Apply nitrogen monthly from mid-May to mid-August, and map affected areas for possible fungicide treatment in the fall. Removal of excessive thatch may help avoid future problems with Spring Dead Spot.

Thatch Removal If thatch (a layer of undecomposed grass) is thicker than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, power rake (vertical mow) in late May. Make sure to vertical mow only after the lawn has completely greened up, or recovery will be very slow.

Renovation In late May, start replanting bare or worn areas using sod or sprigs (3 to 5 bushels per 1,000 square feet). Bermudagrasses can be planted using unhulled bermudagrass seed at 1 to 2 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Keep the seedbed continually moist with light, frequent irrigation several times a day. You may continue to renovate the lawn throughout the summer months (see *Carolina Lawns*, AG-69).

June through August

Mowing Follow March through May guidelines.

Fertilization Apply 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet every 4 to 6 weeks using the March to May fertilization guidelines.

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Watering Follow March through May guidelines.

Weed Control Apply postemergence herbicides as needed for control of summer annual and perennial broadleaf weeds like white clover, knotweed, spurge, and lespedeza. Two or three applications 7 to 10 days apart are required to control crabgrass and goosegrass. Do not apply herbicides during a drought or when grass and weeds are not actively growing.

Thatch Removal If thatch is thicker than ½ inch, remove it using a vertical mower. Thatch can be removed monthly if the lawn has sufficient time to recover.

Insect Control Check for and control any white grubs and nematodes.

September through November

Mowing Continue mowing the lawn following the March to May guidelines until several weeks before the first expected frost. *In the Piedmont:* If the lawn is not overseeded in the winter, raise the mowing height ½ inch to protect it from winter kill. Raise the mowing height ½ inch in early to mid-September in the mountains, around mid- to late September in the Piedmont, and late September to mid-October in the east.

Fertilization To minimize Spring Dead Spot, apply no more than ½ pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in September, or 4 weeks before the first expected frost. Use a low nitrogen, high potassium fertilizer like 5-10-30, or supplement with 1 pound of potash (K₂O) per 1,000 square feet 4 to 6 weeks before expected frost using 1.6 pounds of muriate of potash (0-0-60) or 2 pounds of potassium sulfate (0-0-50). (The third number represents potassium.)

Insect Control Check for and control any white grubs. Fall is the best time to control grubs (*see White Grub Control in Turf*, AG-366).

Disease Control If Spring Dead Spot was a problem, apply a fungicide at high rates to problem area. Areas should be mapped because fungicide treatment is expensive.

Watering Although you won't have to water much, make sure the soil doesn't get powder dry.

December through February

Mowing Remove lawn debris (rocks, sticks, and leaves) to ensure proper greenup in the spring.

Fertilization DO NOT fertilize at this time. Submit soil samples for analysis every 3 years to determine nutrient requirements. (Contact your county Extension Center for details.) Based on the results of your soil test, apply lime or sulfur to adjust soil pH.

Watering Follow September through November guidelines.

Weed Control Apply broadleaf herbicides as necessary for control of winter annual weeds like chickweed and henbit. Atrazine or simazine can be applied in November or December to control annual bluegrass and winter annual broadleaf weeds.

More About Bermudagrass

Bermudagrasses range from coarse to fine in leaf texture, and form a dense durable surface under relatively low mowing heights. They tolerate drought well, require full sunlight, and grow well on all but poorly drained soils. Bermudagrass withstands wear and traffic, establishes quickly, and recovers rapidly from injury.

Bermudagrass can invade flowerbeds and other areas because they have stems that spread rapidly above and below ground. Herbicides like Vantage, Fusilade, or Roundup control bermudagrass, although maintaining a crisp straight edge with these materials is difficult.

Bermudagrass lawns perform best when maintained at ¾ to 1 inch using a reel mower; however, good performance may be achieved with a rotary mower with sharp blades set as low as possible without scalping. Uneven ground can make mowing difficult. Common bermudagrass, compared to hybrid bermudagrass (Tifway and Tifgreen), can be seeded and maintained at higher mowing heights. Common bermudagrass provides a less dense lawn (so it may have more weeds), has a wider leaf blade, and produces more seedheads, but it requires less maintenance.

Most fine-textured turf-type bermudagrasses must be planted using sod, sprigs, or plugs, but the coarser textured common bermudagrass may be planted using seed.

Tifway (419) and Tifway II are the best all-purpose hybrids, but they may require more frequent mowing and fertilization than common bermudagrass. Both hybrids are finer in leaf texture, more dense, and have fewer seedheads than common bermudagrass. They are also pollen-free. Midiron and Vamont are very aggressive, coarse-textured, cold-tolerant cultivars that must be planted vegetatively (using sprigs or plugs). Savannah, NuMex-Sahara, Princess, and Guymon are seeded varieties. They resemble common bermudagrass in that they tend to be coarser textured than hybrid bermudagrass.

Because of their aggressive nature, bermudagrasses have very few serious pest problems, but they are subject to sting-nematode damage on sandy soils. Nematode damage leads to shallow-rooted plants that do not respond to water or fertilizer. This results in thin, weak areas that are prone to weed invasion. If nematode problems are suspected, contact your county Cooperative Extension agent.

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Published by the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service

