

Keeping your lawn beautiful

Advice for maintaining bluegrass lawns from **Brent Mecham**,
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Is bluegrass a good choice for Colorado lawns?

In recent years, Kentucky bluegrass has gotten a reputation for being bad for our climate because in order to keep it looking lush and green year-round, it requires a lot of water and fertilizer. Kentucky bluegrass is a cool-season grass, which means that when temperatures are moderate (like in the spring and fall) it looks nice and green. But when temperatures get very high, it naturally wants to turn

brown until the weather cools down again.

There are warm-season grasses like Buffalograss and Blue Grama that are brown during cooler months and green during warmer ones. They generally require less water and maintenance, but they cannot handle the wear-and-tear that bluegrass can.

Many people have been hard at work trying to find a grass that is as attractive and tough as Kentucky bluegrass

that requires less water. Although alternatives to bluegrass exist – tall fescues, fine fescues and even some native grasses – most people still prefer the appearance of bluegrass. For the time being, most Colorado lawns are made up of Kentucky bluegrass.

So we need to learn how to maintain it properly, water it wisely and begin to change our societal expectations that grass has to be lush green all the time. We do, after all, live on the edge of what was once called “the great American desert.”

Watering

Is it best to water frequently for short periods of time?

No. Water infrequently but thoroughly to promote vigorous root growth. Also, try not to water when it is windy.

How do I know when to turn on my sprinklers?

Water when your lawn shows the need. A change of color and footprints that remain for a long time indicate a thirsty lawn. Paying attention to the condition of your lawn is a much better way to know when to water instead of relying upon a calendar schedule. It is best to water late in the evening or early in the morning.

Check regularly for broken or missing sprinkler heads. Make sure sprinklers are adjusted properly to water your lawn, not the pavement.

Use a rain gauge to measure how much water you're giving your grass. During the hot summer months, most lawns need about 1.5 inches per week and less when it is cooler.

How can I minimize run-off?

Use the “cycle-and-soak” method. This means turning off your sprinklers periodically while watering, giving the water time to soak into the soil (about 30 minutes) before turning them back on.

Mowing

How short should I cut my lawn?

Most lawn grasses seem to do well when they are mowed to 2.5 to 3 inches. It's long enough to establish deep root systems in properly prepared soil but short enough to remain aesthetically pleasing.

How often should I mow?

During periods of active growth – i.e. after substantial rain showers – you may need to mow every few days. But when it gets hotter and drier, mowing this often is not necessary. Remove no more than one-third of the grass blade at a time.

Should I bag up my grass clippings?

Generally, no. Clippings that are left on the lawn will decompose and return important nutrients to the grass. And, as a bonus, this practice saves time and prevents bags full of clippings ending up at the landfill.

Fertilizing

Do lawns need to be fertilized?

Healthy lawns need food, and thus fertilizing will help improve and maintain the health of your grass. If you mulch mow – meaning you leave your clippings on the grass after mowing – you can reduce the amount of fertilizing necessary by as much as one-third.

How often and how much should I fertilize?

With established lawns, it is best to fertilize several times during the growing season. Check out the following recommended schedule. The numbers reflect the pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet you should use to fertilize:

Mid-March to April – ½ pound to 1 pound;
May to June – 1 pound; July to August – 0;
mid-August to September – 1 pound;
early October to early November – 1 pound

Note that lawns that endure more wear-and-tear need more fertilizer to recuperate.

What kind of fertilizers should I use?

Choose fertilizers that include micro-nutrients and that have a nitrogen source that is a slow-release type.

Aerating

What does aerating do?

It pokes holes through the thatch layer of the grass so that moisture and nutrients can be absorbed into the soil more easily. It also alleviates compacted areas, which constrain root growth.

When should I aerate?

It is best to aerate during the cool parts of the growing season, like the spring and fall, and when there is a lot of moisture in the ground. Do not aerate when it is hot.

How should I aerate?

You can hire a lawn-service to aerate your lawn or rent a machine from a rental yard.

To aerate small areas, a coring tool that is pushed into the ground with your foot can suffice. But for larger areas, you will need a machine.

What do I do with the cores of soil left on my lawn?

You can rake them up and recycle them or you can just leave them. They will break apart in a couple of weeks.

Some people find the cores to be a nuisance and want to remove them. But if you do not, they won't do any damage if left.

If you want to know more

Visit other parts of www.ncwcd.org

From the homepage, click on the Irrigation Management link. Then select Turf & Urban Landscape.

Visit the NCWCD facility.

The NCWCD headquarters in Berthoud boasts a unique Outdoor Laboratory for Landscape and Irrigation Education. OLLIE provides practical information about what to grow and how to grow it in Colorado. You can take a look at dozens of species of grasses and hundreds of plants. It is free to visit. **NCWCD offers guided public tours, free of charge, from 2 to 4 p.m. every Tuesday during the summer.** Call 970-532-7700 to sign up. You can also take a self-guided tour at any time.

Visit <http://csuturf.colostate.edu>

This is a Web site from the CSU Cooperative Extension that offers helpful lawn advice.



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