

## Tall Fescue Maintenance Calendar

This calendar of suggested maintenance practices is designed to be a general guide in the care of your fescue lawn. Location, soil type, health of lawn, and other factors affect turf performance. For these reasons, the following management practices and dates should be adjusted to suit your particular home lawn conditions.

### March Through May

**Mowing:** Mow lawn at a height of 3 inches. Mow frequently enough so that no more than 1/3 of the grass blade is removed. Always leave clippings on the lawn in a practice called "grass-cycling". Grass clippings decompose quickly and do not contribute to thatch. For more information on mowing lawns refer to [HGIC 1205, Mowing Lawns](#).

**Fertilizing:** Do not fertilize tall fescue after March 15. For more information on fertilizing lawns refer to [HGIC 1201, Fertilizing Lawns](#).

**Irrigation:** Water as needed to prevent drought. About 1 inch of water per application each week is adequate. Sandy soils often require more frequent watering, or about 1/2 inch of water every third day. For more information on watering lawns refer to [HGIC 1207, Watering Lawns](#).

**Weed Control:** Apply preemergence herbicides to control crabgrass, goosegrass, foxtail and other annual weeds. Apply when forsythia or dogwoods are in bloom. For more information on weed control refer to [HGIC 2309, Managing Weeds in Fescue Lawns](#).

### June Through August

**Mowing:** Raise mower height to 3 1/2 inches. Mow frequently enough so that no more than 1/3 of the grass blade is removed. Always leave clippings on the lawn in a practice called "grass-cycling".  
**Fertilizing:** Do not fertilize fescue at this time. Submit a soil sample to your local extension office to determine nutrient requirements. For more information on soil testing, refer to [HGIC 1652, Soil Testing](#).

**Irrigation:** Either water as needed to prevent drought or allow the lawn to go dormant. About 1 inch of water per application each week is adequate for irrigated lawns. Sandy soils often require more frequent watering, or about 1/2 inch of water every third day. Dormant lawns in summer should receive about 1/2 inch of water every 3 weeks to prevent crown dehydration and plant death.

**Disease Control:** Check lawn frequently for brown patch which is the most widespread disease of fescue. It most commonly occurs in June, July, and August but may be seen as early as March and as late as September. For more information on symptoms and control measures for brown patch refer to [HGIC 2150, Brown Patch Disease of Lawns](#).

**Weed Control:** Avoid the use of herbicides at this time. Fescue stressed by drought and high temperatures is more susceptible to herbicide damage.

**Insect Control:** Check for grubs in August and control if necessary. For more information on grubs refer to [IIS/TO-9, Whitegrub Management in Turfgrass](#).

## September Through November

**Mowing:** Mow lawn between 2½ and 3½ inches. Mow frequently enough so that no more than ⅓ of the grass blade is removed. Practice "grass-cycling" which is simply leaving the clippings on the lawn. Grass clippings decompose quickly and can provide up to 25 percent of the lawn's fertilizer needs. If prolonged rain or other factors prevent mowing and clippings are too plentiful to leave on the lawn, they can be collected and used as mulch.

**Fertilizing:** The best way to determine your lawn's nutrient needs is by a soil test. Samples can be taken to your local county extension office. Results will also indicate if lime is needed to adjust the soil pH. In the absence of a soil test, use a complete turf-grade fertilizer with a 4-1-2 ratio, such as 16-4-8. Apply 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet in September and, optionally again in November. To determine the amount of product required to apply 1 pound of nitrogen, divide 100 by the first number in the fertilizer bag. For a 16-4-8 fertilizer, divide 100 by 16. The result, 6.25 pounds, contains 1 pound of nitrogen and should be applied over 1000 square feet of area.

**Irrigation:** A dark bluish gray color, footprinting, and wilted, folded, or curled leaves indicate that the turf needs water. Tall fescue needs a weekly application of about 1 to 1¼ inches of water, which will wet the soil to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Sandy soils often require more frequent watering, such as ¾ inch every three days.

**Weed Control:** Apply broadleaf herbicides to control dandelions, wild onions, cudweed, and other weeds if necessary. Check product labels carefully because some herbicides may affect newly seeded turf.

**Insect control:** Check for white grubs through October and control if necessary.

**Aerification:** Core aerify lawns subject to heavy traffic or on clay soils to minimize compaction and improve rooting. Break up plugs. For more information on aerating lawns refer to [HGIC 1200, Aerating Lawns](#).

**Renovation:** Overseed thin, bare areas as grass begins to respond to cooler temperatures in September and early October. Use a blend of tall fescue cultivars at 6 pounds per 1000 square feet. Apply a starter fertilizer with high phosphorus at time of seeding. Keep seedbed moist with light, frequent sprinklings several times a day to ensure good germination.

**Thatch Removal:** It is not necessary to remove thatch with most tall fescue lawns.

## December Through February

**Mowing:** Mow lawn at 3 inches and keep it clear of debris including leaves.

**Fertilizing:** Fertilize with 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet in February. In the absence of soil test results, use a complete turf-grade fertilizer with a 4-1-2 ratio.

**Irrigation:** Water, if needed, to prevent excessive drying. About 1 inch of water per application each week is adequate.

**Weed Control:** Apply broadleaf herbicides as necessary for control of chickweed, henbit or other weeds.

**Source:** Bert McCarty (editor). *Southern Lawns - Best Management Practices for the Selection, Establishment and Maintenance of Southern Lawngrasses*. Clemson University Public Service Publishing, 2003.

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