

Weed Suppression in Lawns – 2020 PMG

Table 5.3 - Cultural practices that promote turfgrass ability to suppress weeds or prevent weed introduction and expansion in cool-season and warm-season lawns.

Cultural practice*	Cool-season lawns (tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, fine-leaf fescues, etc)	Warm-season lawns (bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, centipedegrass, St. Augustinegrass)
Mow height	Mow tall fescue at three to four inches, others at two- to three-and-a-half inches.	Mow St. Augustine grass at three to four inches, others at one to two inches
Mow frequency	Follow the one-third rule, mow every four to five days in spring and fall and seven to ten days in summer.	Follow the one-third rule, mow every four to five days in summer and seven to ten days in spring and fall.
Mower	Keep blades sharp; sharpen blades every four to six weeks during the mowing season. Zoysiagrass and tall fescue turfs require more frequent sharpening than others.	
Soil	Conduct soil tests every three-four years and improve poor soils by adding compost, topsoil, core aeration or adjusting pH to between 6.3 and 6.8	
Fertility	Depending on the grass, apply two to three pounds nitrogen (N) per thousand square feet once per year, mostly in the fall. Do not apply more than one pound of water soluble nitrogen in a single application. Excessive spring nitrogen applications reduce summer stress tolerance and can increase weed and disease pressure. Apply phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) as indicated by soil test results. Avoid applying phosphorus and potassium when weeds are expected to germinate.	Depending on the grass, apply one to four pounds nitrogen (N) per thousand square feet each year, primarily in late spring thru mid-summer. Do not apply more than one pound of water soluble nitrogen in a single application. Apply phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) as indicated by soil test results.
Irrigation	If supplemental irrigation is available or desired, irrigate deeply and frequently, providing at least one inch of water per week, including rainfall, during summer stress periods. Irrigate in early morning hours to minimize leaf wetness periods and reduce disease pressure. Avoid supplemental irrigation during periods when weeds are expected to germinate. If no irrigation is available, allow lawn to go dormant during drought	
Clipping management	Return clippings, as they essentially serve as 'slow release fertilizer' to the lawn and provide up to one-third of its annual nutrient needs. Do not worry about returning weed seed in clippings to the lawn, as indigenous seed in the soil far outnumber weed seeds deposited by mowing. If clippings are removed, use the higher range of recommended fertility programs. Compost collected clippings with other lawn and garden debris and return the compost to the lawn in order to improve soil tilth.	
Variety selection	Choose adapted varieties, refer to http://www.ext.vt.edu and search for the "recommended list" to find the latest turfgrass variety suggestions. Change turfgrass species or variety in different environments, such as shade.	
Aeration	Test soil one day after rain by inserting a knife or screwdriver into the ground. If difficult to insert, that area of lawn needs aeration. Aerate cool-season lawns in spring and/or fall. Aerate warm-season lawns in summer.	
Exclusion	Prevent weeds from entering new areas. Inspect soil, manure, or any organic additives for invasive weeds. Target creeping weeds outside the lawn or develop strategies that limit invasion into the lawn. Use only certified grass seed that is free of weed seed.	
Improve conditions	Fix drainage problems, trim low tree limbs, and try to increase light quantity and wind movement where turfgrass is growing.	
Choose sites	Don't grow turfgrass in an area where it is not adapted. Deep shade or extremely poor soils are best suited to an inorganic mulch or plant species commonly used as ground covers that are better adapted to the environment.	

* There are numerous Virginia Cooperative Extension publications that provide much more extensive detail in overall best management practices in lawn care available at www.ext.vt.edu.