

Turfgrass Management Calendar: Kentucky Bluegrass Lawns

Turf management is all about timing and persistence. The overall appearance of a lawn is directly related to the proper timing of maintenance activities and sticking with a solid, well-timed plan for several years in a row. The following suggestions are for lawn care throughout the year in Iowa. Because every site is different, these practices may need to be adjusted to suit different situations. Dates for southern Iowa are 1-2 weeks earlier, for northern Iowa about 1-2 weeks later than indicated.

March through May

Mowing – There is no set date to begin mowing. The season's first mowing will depend on the turfgrass varieties present in a yard. Often, the first mowing helps stimulate a lawn to grow. Most lawns in Iowa are predominately Kentucky bluegrass and may contain perennial ryegrass, fine leaf fescues, and tall fescue. Because these cool-season grasses grow rapidly during the spring, mowing should be timed so that no more than one-third of the total leaf surface is removed at each mowing. When the one-third rule is followed, grass clippings easily filter into the grass canopy and can be left on the lawn. Clippings that are thick enough to completely shade the grass underneath should be removed. A mowing height of 2-3 inches is recommended. Sharpened mower blades help maintain healthy grass.

Watering – Supplemental irrigation is rarely required. Avoid overwatering in order to promote a deep root system. If planning to irrigate, do it deeply and infrequently. Keeping the surface wet with frequent watering invites weeds and results in poor rooting.

Fertilization – A soil test is the best way to determine lawn fertility for elements other than nitrogen (N). Nitrogen fertilization varies with weather conditions, species, soil type, and other factors. Contact a certified soil testing laboratory for additional information and for sample collection requirements.

In the absence of a soil test, use a complete nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium fertilizer (N-P-K) and apply 0.75-1 pound of nitrogen fertilizer per 1,000 square feet. Applications may be split, but do not apply more than one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in a single application.

Weed Control – Use a preemergence herbicide to control crabgrass. Often, these herbicides are combined with fertilizer and are packaged as "weed and feed" products. General recommendations are to apply preemergence herbicides between April 15 and May 1 or when soil temperatures reach 55°F. The exact application date will vary by location. Lawns in the southern part of Iowa may receive herbicide applications closer to April 15 while lawns in the northern part of the state may be closer to May 1. To ensure proper control of annual weeds, make sure to water in the preemergence herbicide after application.

Aerification – Aerification can be performed in spring, late summer, or fall. Spring aerification should be done when the grass is actively growing. Spring aerification should be done before preemergence herbicides are applied to prevent crabgrass. The best time of year for aerification is early September.

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Seeding – Spring seeding may be done if irrigation is available but late summer or early fall is preferred. Lawns that are spring seeded usually become heavily infested with weeds unless the proper herbicides are used. Light, frequent irrigation may be performed in conjunction with a spring seeding if regular rainfall is insignificant.

Cool-season lawn management calendar.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Mowing				When grass is actively growing								
Watering					As needed							
Fertilizing												
Weed Control												
Preemergent												
Broad leaf												
Post emergent												
Insect Occurrence												
Billbug adult												
Billbug larvae												
White grubs												
Sod webworm												
Disease Occurrence												
Snow molds												
Leafspot												
Dollarspot												
Necrotic ring spot, Summer patch												
Melting out												
Aerification									Best time			
Seeding												
Sodding												

Dates for southern Iowa are 1-2 weeks earlier, for northern Iowa about 1-2 weeks later.

June through August

Mowing – Raise the mowing height during hot, dry weather; mowing heights over three inches are preferred. Increasing the mowing height helps control weeds, creates a deeper root system, and will make the lawn less susceptible to insects, diseases, and drought.

Watering – In order to remain actively growing during the summer, lawns require about one inch of water per week from natural rainfall and supplemental irrigation. In very hot weather lawns may need 1.25 inches of water per week. Occasional lawn wilting helps promote a deeper root system. If using irrigation, water infrequently but deeply during the early morning hours. In the absence of irrigation, Kentucky bluegrass will escape drought by going dormant (turning brown) and usually will recover with an increase in water or in the fall.

Fertilization – Do not fertilize during summer to prevent diseases.

Weed control – Herbicide use generally is not recommended during summer. If a preemergence herbicide was not applied in the spring, juvenile crabgrass plants may be controlled with a postemergence herbicide.

Insect occurrence – If a lawn has a history of damage from bluegrass billbug and white grubs, control measures may be justified. Increased activity of birds, moles, and skunks may indicate insects are present. Insecticide use should be handled by a reputable lawn care company.

Disease occurrence – A host of diseases affect turfgrass throughout the year. Fungicides rarely are warranted for home lawns and specific cultural practices can help control

diseases in home lawns. Avoid mowing the turfgrass too short, watering during the evening hours, heavily fertilizing late in the spring, and accumulating large amounts of thatch. If turfgrass diseases are present, contact the Iowa State University Plant and Insect Disease Clinic (clinic.ipm.iastate.edu) for assistance with identification. Contact a reputable lawn care company for help with control.

September through November

September is an ideal time for lawn maintenance practices such as seeding, aerifying, and fertilizing.

Mowing – Continue mowing as long as grass is actively growing. If desired, reduce mowing height to 2-3 inches. Avoid extremely low mowing heights to keep from harming plants before winter.

Watering – Irrigation should not be required. If fall seeding is done, irrigate lightly and frequently to keep soil moist to promote germination. Freshly seeded or overseeded areas need to be kept moist for at least the first month after seeding.

Fertilization – Apply 2-3 pounds of nitrogen fertilizer per 1,000 square feet. Fertilizer should be split into two applications with the first application in mid-September and the second application done after the grass has stopped growing. Do not apply more than one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in a single application.

Weed control – Fall is the preferred time to control perennial broadleaf weeds, and waiting until after the first frost is best. The later timing will increase control of broadleaf weeds. However, some broadleaf herbicides may affect new seedlings. To avoid damage, wait to apply herbicide until new seedlings have been mowed two or three times.

Aerification – Late-summer to fall is the best time to aerify because the grass is actively growing and easily recovers. Applying fertilizer a week before aerification can help speed up recovery. Aerification machines that pull a plug work better than machines that only spike the yard. Make sure the yard has adequate moisture after aerification to help promote recovery. Compost can be added to the aerification holes to help improve soil quality as well. Overseeding may be done by placing seed in aerification holes to attempt to establish grass in thin or damaged areas.

Seeding – Seeding between August 15 and September 30 generally produces the best results because soil temperatures are ideal and annual weeds are ending their lifecycle. Sow Kentucky bluegrass between August 15 and September 15 at a rate of 1.5-3 pounds per 1,000 square feet, depending on how quickly it should be filled in. Kentucky bluegrass can germinate as late as September 30 but seeding earlier ensures the best establishment.

Tree Leaves – A good quality mulching blade can be used to chop up fallen tree leaves. The leaves can provide additional fertilizer if mulched into the yard. Make sure the tree leaves are chopped small enough to fall through the turfgrass canopy to avoid smothering the turfgrass. This may mean passing over the yard multiple times if large amounts of leaves are present.

For more information

www.extension.iastate.edu/turfgrass

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