

# Best practices for maintaining your lawn

As a property owner, there are many things you can do to keep your lawn healthy and beautiful. By incorporating these best practices into your yard maintenance routine, you can ensure your lawn care service provider's hard work lasts longer and is more effective.

## 1. Maintain a recommended mowing height

Mowing height recommendations vary by grass type. Mow regularly and avoid removing more than one-third of the surface of the turf blade, as short mowing can damage the turf. Grasses with higher mowing heights are better able to compete with weeds and tolerate drought stress.<sup>1</sup> Ensure mower blades are sharp as dull mower blades tear the turf rather than cutting it, and creates a ragged appearance. Additionally, mow when your turf is dry to avoid clumps of clippings, which will smother turf if not removed. Mowing dry turf allows even distribution of clippings over the lawn.

This chart provides an overview of recommended mowing heights for a variety of grass types.<sup>2</sup>

Turf type	Recommended mowing height (in.)
Kentucky bluegrass	1.5–2.5
Kentucky bluegrass/fine fescue mix	1.5–2.5
Kentucky bluegrass/tall fescue mix	2.5–3.5
Kentucky bluegrass/tall fescue/fine fescue mix	2.5–3.5
Kentucky bluegrass/perennial ryegrass mix	2–3
Bermudagrass (common or hybrid)	0.75–2
Bahiagrass	2–4
Centipedegrass	1–1.5
St. Augustinegrass	2.5–4
Tall fescue	2.5–3.5
Zoysiagrass	0.75–2

## 2. Water regularly

In general, turf requires 1 in. of water per week during the active growing season, and should be adjusted based on weather conditions. It's best to apply water in smaller amounts during the week instead of all at once, and to **water in the morning or early afternoon** during the heat of the day.<sup>2</sup> Watering at night produces a wet lawn, creating ideal conditions for disease. Irrigation during heat and moisture stress periods can encourage turf recovery, reduce weed encroachment and help alleviate certain disease and insect damage.

### 3. Don't over-fertilize

While fertilization has a direct influence on the ability of turf to tolerate disease pressure, too much can be detrimental. Ensure your lawn is properly fertilized, but avoid adding too much fertilizer, which can cause unwanted damage such as yellowing or browning, or even kill healthy grass.

### 4. Aerate

Soils that are subject to heavy traffic are prone to compaction.<sup>3</sup> Aeration can help loosen compacted soil, which helps water, air and fertilizers reach the turf roots. It can also help with overseeding. Typically, you should aerate once or twice a season by removing small cylindrical cores of soil and thatch from your lawn. Tools like a mechanical core aerator can help with this process and can aerate a yard quickly to maximize the area covered. The best times for aerating cool-season turf are spring and fall when the soil is moist.<sup>4</sup> Warm-season turf should be aerated in the summer.

### 5. Manage shaded areas

Growing turf in shaded areas can be challenging. Turfgrass needs a significant amount of sunlight to thrive, and when adequate amounts aren't received, lawns can thin out. Cultural practices, like pruning tree foliage to help increase the amount of filtered light, can help improve the look and feel of your lawn.<sup>5</sup>

### 6. Prevent brown patches

You may begin to see brown spots on your lawn that are likely caused by insects or disease rather than lack of water. If you begin to see damage, contact your lawn care service to develop a treatment plan to help stop the problem from spreading and protect the investment you have made in your lawn.

**By incorporating these practices to your lawn care routine, you can create strong, dense turf, which can better withstand weed and disease pressure throughout the season.**



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<sup>1-3</sup> Integrated Pest Management for Home Lawns, R. N. Calhoun, K. W. Frank, G. T. Lyman, Michigan State University, <http://msue.anr.msu.edu/resources/integrated-pest-management-for-home-lawns>

<sup>4</sup> Miller, G. 2017. Lawns, Chpt 9. In: K.A. Moore, and L.K. Bradley (eds). North Carolina Extension Gardener Handbook. NC State Extension, Raleigh, NC. <http://content.ces.ncsu.edu/9-lawns>

<sup>5</sup> What is Core Aeration? <https://weedmanusa.com/resources/lawn-core-aeration>

<sup>6</sup> How Pruning Trees Can Help Your Lawn Thrive <https://weedmanusa.com/news/how-pruning-trees-can-help-your-lawn-thrive>

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