

Time is now to start improving lawns

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Though this has been another relatively good growing season for turfgrasses throughout the region, many areas are still showing damage from the summer or from last winter. Mid- to late-August is the time to dramatically improve turf areas and improve resiliency to future stresses. Depending on the turf species present and extent of damage, the course of action ranges among the following three options:

1. For a moderately thinned lawn (no larger than softball-sized holes on a Kentucky bluegrass lawn or baseball-sized holes on a tall fescue lawn), aggressive fall fertilization and broadleaf weed control applied in late September through late October should dramatically improve the lawn.
2. For Kentucky bluegrass with larger than softball-sized holes on a Kentucky bluegrass lawn or larger than baseball-sized holes on a tall fescue lawn, aerification and/or power raking followed by overseeding will help reestablish turfgrass into the thin areas. Seed tall fescue back into tall fescue lawns. Seed Kentucky bluegrass back into Kentucky bluegrass lawns unless you want to convert the lawn to tall fescue, in which case overseeding with tall fescue across the entire lawn can be effective. In this case, mow the lawn to 1.0-1.5" or as low as feasible to minimize competition from existing plants. Aerify aggressively and/or power rake to maximize seed-soil contact and drop seed or power-overseed tall fescue across the entire lawn. Keep mowing at the low heights until seedling leaves are being cut and then gradually raise the mowing height back to 3.0-3.5" where it should remain. Multiple years of overseeding tall fescue into Kentucky bluegrass will be required to increase the percent of tall fescue in the lawn. Regardless of the species overseeded, aggressive fall fertilization and broadleaf weed control applied in late September through late October is required to further improve the lawn
3. If the lawn is severely damaged or has been perennially problematic because of species, soil type, drainage, etc., now is the perfect time to start over with complete renovation. This may include regrading, tillage, and/or incorporating organic matter into a clay soil followed by reseeding and aggressive post-seeding care for most effective establishment. This should be done in August if you are choosing to use a cool-season grass like Kentucky bluegrass or tall fescue. Wait until May if buffalograss will be the future grass on the lawn.

Though a number of advertisements tout new miracle grasses such as Grassology™, Cutting Edge™ or Canada Green™, locally purchased turf-type tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, or buffalograss are still the best grasses for lawns in Northern Great Plains.

We have many relatively recent publications on our web page including:

1. Improving turf in the fall:
<http://turf.unl.edu/pdfcaextpub/LawnImprovementPrograms2010A.pdf>
2. Choosing grasses and buying seed for lawns in Nebraska and the Northern Great Plains (2012):
<http://turf.unl.edu/pdfcaextpub/Grassesforlawns2012k.pdf>
3. Establishing lawns from seed (2012):
<http://turf.unl.edu/pdfcaextpub/Establishingturffromseed2012l.pdf>
4. Establishing lawns from sod (2012):
<http://turf.unl.edu/pdfcaextpub/Establishingturffromsod2012m.pdf>

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