

HELPFUL INFO AND TIPS FOR SECURE TURF CUSTOMERS

Below we've included info that addresses the questions we hear most often from our customers. If we haven't answered your question, give us a call.

ABOUT LAWNS

A Well-Kept Lawn

Lawns provide curb appeal, cushioning for bare feet, filtration for carbon monoxide, erosion prevention, and play areas. A well-kept lawn is one of the greatest producers of oxygen.

Most lawns in the Piedmont of the Carolinas are fescue lawns. They require balanced care to survive. For a strong and healthy lawn, it's a good idea to occasionally relocate lawn games, furniture and activities. This rotation gives stressed areas time to recuperate.

Fescue lawns are best re-seeded in the fall. After the sowing it is important to stay off the newly planted grass until it matures and has been cut several times. Even then the grass can't take repeated traffic very well.

Proper Mowing Practices

Good mowing practices are primary in achieving the optimal appearance and health of a turf area. Mowing is the major time-consuming operation in lawn management. The height the grass is mowed as well as the frequency and pattern of the mowing are all important factors in good lawn care. See below for details—and be careful to give attention to another equally important detail: consistently sharp mower blades.

Mowing Frequency and Height

Mowing should be done year round. In early and late winter you may only be tip cutting, but this will stimulate plant and root growth. Do not let grass get higher than 6 inches at any time during the year. Using a bagger keeps leaves and grass off the lawn.

Do not mow as often in a drought period. Do mow to keep seed heads cut. All fescues go dormant when temperatures reach and stay at or near 90

degrees. Dormant grass will look dead. Fescue recovers when favorable conditions return. It is a cool season grass and looks best during spring and fall.

The rule is to mow often, but never too closely. Here in the Piedmont, fescue should be mowed at a height of between 3.5 to 4 inches. By cutting your grass often you allow the grass to assume a dwarf growing habit and encourage the production of tillers.

These tillers produce side shoots that thicken the lawn in spring and fall. When fescue is allowed to grow to the right height between cuttings, the blades of grass grow and so do the tillers. Conversely, mowing too frequently destroys tall tillers and side-shoots—causing the grass to weaken and thin. Fescue should be cut at regular intervals and never too closely.

Irregular close cutting destroys a good quality lawn because the desirable tillers are rapidly weakened. Once they are weakened it will take weeks or months to fix the problem, because rebuilding the turf's roots and tillers will take time. It's like starting over.

The height of the grass is the best guide. At cutting time it should be no more than .5 to 1.5 inches above the recommended height (3.5 to 4 inches).

To avoid damage, cut twice a week when the grass is growing vigorously. If your grass grew tall while you were on vacation, merely tip it at the first cut. A few days later cut again and reduce the height, after which you can cut at the recommended height. It would be a good idea to arrange for your lawn to be cut by someone you can trust or hire a professional service to do it while you're away or unable to mow. (Make sure the person that will mow your lawn knows the proper mowing height.) You will feel much better knowing you don't have to return home to an overgrown lawn.

Mowing Patterns:

Be sure to change mowing patterns each week; avoid cutting the grass in the same direction. This practice prevents tire-wear, ruts, wash boarding

and compaction of soil. Cutting in the same paths each week will also cause grass to grow in that direction.

Grassy areas beside street and walks need special attention. Heat radiates from paved and concreted areas. During the summer, this radiant heat makes it difficult to provide enough moisture to keep the nearby grass healthy. Keep the areas edged and cut weekly, to a height of 4 inches.

PROPER WATERING PRACTICES

Water Deeply or Not At All

Light sprinklings of water do more harm than good, and this is true whether the water comes from rain or your water hose. Light watering causes a problem: shallow root growth. If the lawn is to stay deeply rooted and healthy, it must be watered until the soil is wet to a minimum depth of 6 inches.

A good rule is to supplement rainfall so that plants receive one inch of water each week. Water until the soil is moist to a depth of 6 to 12 inches. To measure, place a rain gauge in each zone. When you have an inch of rain in the gauge, check the soil moisture to the proper depths. You will need to check each watering zone by using a large knife or coring tool to cut a 1-inch-wide-by-6-inch-deep core from the turf. Remove the core and examine the moisture level. Replace dirt and grass core and press firmly back in place. Adjust watering to meet the zone's water needs.

The 1-inch-of-water-to-penetrate-6-inches-deep rule does not hold for all areas. Sloping areas, for example, may need more water to achieve the desired depth. And, watering the slopes can cause over-watering in other spots. Adjust times and frequencies accordingly. Let all areas dry out 2 to 3 inches in depth before watering again.

It is impossible to prescribe a fixed schedule for watering because of the multiple factors involved, including differences in soil, shade, grass species, elevation, weather, irrigation methods and water pressures. With so many variables, what's good today may not be good next month or at the same time next year. The thing to do is stay flexible, monitor, and water when

and where needed throughout the growing season.

COMMON LAWN PROBLEMS AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM

Conditions that Contribute to Turf Deterioration

Sixteen essential nutrients are needed for healthy grass growth. Lack of these nutrients will cause a lawn's health to deteriorate. Other conditions not conducive to grass growth include excessive foot or pet traffic, compaction, lack of moisture, excess moisture, insects, disease, bad mowing habits, soil acidity, humidity, drought, winter stress, heat stress, shade, and thatch.

Raking fall leaves excessively will pull out newly planted grass. When possible, lightly blow leaves or use a bag on the mower.

Do not let fall leaves build up. Leaves left even a few days will cause thinning of grass. Bare spots that result from untended fallen leaves encourage weed germination. The damage becomes apparent in the heat of summer, six months after the damage actually occurred.

Fungi in the Lawn

While all lawns contain some active fungi, weather conditions favorable to them and incorrect mowing and watering practices will make them spread rapidly. When this occurs, a fungus treatment needs to be applied. The treatments have a life cycle of 30 days or less. Rain, irrigation and humidity shorten the curative cycle of the application. If such problematic conditions occur within the treatment cycle's timetable, additional applications will be needed to re-stimulate the curative process.

Fungus damage can and will happen. When it does, the goal is to suppress and control the fungus. If damage is severe, the appearance of your lawn will be affected for the remainder of the growing season. If you suspect that your lawn is suffering from a lawn fungus, call Secure Turf immediately.

Weeds

Weeds are simply plants that grow in the wrong place. The main point to be aware of is that there is no such thing as a weed-free environment.

Weeds come in thousands of shapes and variations. They are of three types: annual, bi-annual, and perennial. Within these categories there are several different types. One is the summer annual, such as crabgrass, foxtail, velvetleaf, pigweed, and spotted spurge. They germinate in the spring and produce seeds before dying in the fall. Another is the winter annual, such as downy brome, henbit, mustard, and pennycress. They germinate in the fall and produce roots and a group of leaves called a *rosette* before winter. This latter group remains inactive until spring when they mature and produce seed; they die before summer. There are many types of perennials, including simple perennials, creeping perennials, and bulbous perennials.

We describe weeds with an eye to their basic structure, which generally places them in one of two groups: *broadleaf* weeds and *grassy* weeds.

Weeds have an amazing capacity to reproduce by seed alone. Most produce an enormous number of seeds. The seeds are spread widely by animals and by weather elements. Each seed is a time capsule that can remain viable in the soil for a long time, up to 75 years. Aerating, digging, or other disturbances of the soil causes these seeds to germinate when sunlight reaches them. Keeping grass cut at 3.5 - 4 inches shades the seeds and keeps them dormant.

Mother Nature has provided weeds with some interesting survival tricks. Some spread by *stolons* that creep above ground stems and root as they grow. Others weeds, like thistles and quackergass, spread by underground *rhizomes*. You can pull or dig these weeds, but unless you get all the roots they soon return. Post-emergent treatments kill only what the spray makes contact with. Weed seedlings present in treated areas return within days or weeks.

Grassy weeds, such as dallis grass, annual bluegrass, poa trivialis, and sometimes Bermuda, are troublesome and unattractive when they appear in an established fescue lawn. These grasses need to be mowed before they produce seed heads. If you need help controlling them, speak with one of our Secure Turf agronomists about available options.

Pre-emergent weed controls applied to the turf never mean complete control of all weeds. Pre-emergents are able to control only a good percentage of grassy or broadleaf weeds. Weeds will show up again at some point.

If you are applying a year-round weed-control program and still you find weeds, you are looking at weed families for which there is no pre-emergent control. Post-emergent herbicides can control these varieties—but only after they emerge.

Pre-emergents form an invisible barrier. Disturbing the barrier weakens and shortens the effectiveness of the treatment. The barrier may be disturbed by dogs that dig, the spinning of mower wheels, pulling of weeds, rain in excess, drought, core aeration, raking and thatching.

When you get right down to it, you have to admit that the main reason weeds are so tough to control is that they're simply tougher than other plants. A word of caution here: If you control only the weeds in your turf area and ignore weeds in beds and surrounding areas, you are making a plethora of weed seeds available to your turf.

Because different weeds grow in different seasons, weed control is an all-year every-year challenge.

Do not expect your lawn and landscape to become weed or problem free. You will always have weeds to some extent and their varieties will differ from year to year.

To control weeds between sprayings, continue your balanced care program: watering, mowing, trimming, and bagging.

Caring for Your Shrubs

If you use irrigation, be aware that it is not a good practice to water shrubs the same amount as you water the grass or to use the same watering heads.

Make it a routine practice to clean leaves from shrubs. Leaves left in shrubs cause stem rot, dying back, and poor performance. Leaves in shrubs also increase the number of harmful insects and fungi.

Keep leaf and organic trash from building up at ground level around the stems of shrubs.

If you spot any sign of insect infestation or plant disease on a shrub, call Secure Turf. Calling sooner rather than later is always the smart move. The quicker the problem is treated, the quicker the plant's recovery.