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Winter Turf Overseeding

By Jim Trog, CIA, CIC



With the hottest August on record now well behind us, it is time to be thinking about what we want to be doing with our lawns for the winter. Those of us who didn't brave the summer heat and enjoy the outdoors may be looking forward to using the green space this winter when the climate is more amicable. Before you can do that, there is some work that will need to be completed so your lawn will remain green through the cooler winter months.

For those who may be new to the area and not know what the process entails, we'll cover the steps you will want to follow to transition from your summer Bermuda grass to a lush winter perennial rye lawn. Soil temperature is an important factor as we want to be installing the winter lawn when the Bermuda grass is slowing down for the winter. This normally occurs when soil temperatures are in the mid 60's, historically in the middle of October, when the overnight temperatures are consistently 60 to 68 degrees or when it is just a little too cold to jump into your unheated pool.

1. The process begins a few weeks earlier by reducing the amount you irrigate your lawn. We recommend reducing irrigation by 30% each week leading up to the time you plan on preparing the lawn for seed – scalping. This helps to encourage the Bermuda grass to slow down and go dormant.
2. The next step in the preparation process is to begin reducing the height you normally mow your lawn by 25% each week a couple of weeks before you plan on seeding. For example, if you normally mow your grass at 2" tall, then the first week would reduce the

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height to 1 ½", the second week to 1" tall and the final week to ½" to ¾" tall. There is no need to mow any lower than this as the remaining "stubble" will help to protect the seed when applied. This process opens up the canopy in the turf so that the seed you spread will come in contact with the soil. Keep in mind, the seed needs to come in to contact with the soil to have successful germination. If it appears that there is a dead mat of grass (thatch) remaining after the lawn has been scalped, you will want to use a hard rake to loosen the dead material and then vacuum up the grass again with your lawn mower. You should avoid using a power rake this time of year to remove the thatch build up as it is damaging to the live Bermuda stolons that won't have a chance to recover as the lawn goes dormant.

3. Before you spread your seed, check your sprinklers. Repair anything that may have been broken during the scalping process or leaks that may have developed over time. You don't want your seed to float away after it is on the ground.
4. Now we are ready to seed. There are two basic types of seed; Annual and Perennial rye grass seed. Annual seed, which is generally less expensive, will have a thick blade and be light green in color through the winter. Perennial seed produces a fine bladed turf grass which is dark green in color. We recommend that you apply a quality

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Establishing New Trees

By Fran Morahan III, Certified Arborist



One of things that is often overlooked when maintaining newly planted trees is checking the tree stakes and support ties. The purpose of staking trees is to minimize the movement of the root ball, preventing wind damage, supporting trees with weak trunks, and for protection from damage such as at sites where lawn mowers are used. Improperly staked trees, lack of inspecting the support ties, and leaving the stakes on for more than 1 or 2 growing seasons have a huge consequence on the long term health of the tree.

The roots of a newly planted tree are not extensive since the trees are grown in containers at nurseries or salvaged, where the roots are cut and the remaining root ball is boxed. Studies have shown that newly planted trees that are not staked establish quicker with a stronger trunk and an extensive root system than a tree that has been staked. Trees that have been staked grow taller with a weaker and less established root system making it more prone to wind damage.

Most container grown trees have a stake attached to the trunk to help the tree grow straight. When transplanting the tree it is important to remove that stake. If the nursery stake is not removed it inhibits the growth of the trunk making the tree dependent on additional support, such as staking, and may also affect the physical condition of the tree by having reverse taper where the upper portion of the trunk thicker than the base of the trunk.

Trees that are staked should have the stakes removed after the first growing season or between 6 months to a year and a half.

The stakes and support ties should be inspected monthly. Thing to look for include the support ties. It should not be snug; it should allow movement of the upper trunk and not be cutting into the bark. Check to see if the root ball is not shifting by lightly shaking the lower part of the trunk, if the root ball area seems solid the stakes can be removed.

Leaving the tree stakes on longer than necessary has no benefit for the tree and may cause more harm than good.



Tree stake and nursery stake left on tree for over 4 growing seasons. Support tie is girdling the trunk.



Tree planted with nursery stake still attached after 1 growing season.



Tree stake, nursery stake, and support ties affecting the trunk taper.

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perennial rye grass seed at the rate of 10 to 12 pounds per 1000 square feet. Higher rates may create a lush lawn that is susceptible to fungus later in the winter and will be more difficult to transition back to the Bermuda lawn early next summer. Apply the seed using a rotary or drop type spreader at half the rate by making two passes in opposite directions. This ensures the most uniform application.

5. Set your sprinkler system to run 4 to 6 times a day with just a couple of minutes each cycle for a typical pop up sprinkler. Keep in mind that the goal here is just to keep the seed moist until it germinates which should happen in the first 7 to 10 days. If your sprinkler timer won't allow you to set enough start times, you may choose to apply a thin layer of mulch, no more than 1/8" to 1/4" deep over the seed. This will also help to keep the seed from drying out. As the seed

germinates, reduce your irrigation frequency in half and double your run times. Do this each week for the first two weeks following germination and you should be ready for your first mowing by week three.

6. Follow the first mowing with an application of a balanced fertilizer such as 21-7-14. Repeat this application again in one month. It is necessary to ensure that your winter lawn is off to a very good start before cold temperatures take hold. Typically, once we have achieved the first frost of the year, it will be difficult to stimulate rye grass to become "greener" without an application of a liquid fertilizer containing iron. So don't be bashful about applying two or even three applications before that happens.

Your lawn is now ready to enjoy. Remember, time spent in preparing the area in advance will yield the nicest lawn all winter long.



MONTHLY LANDSCAPE CHECKLIST

Plant Renovation List (Common Type Plants)

- ✓ Bat-Faced Cuphea
- ✓ Salvia dori (Desert Sage)
- ✓ Soaptree Yucca

– General Irrigation Setting (Actual times will vary depending on the precipitation rate of your system)

- ✓ Bermuda Grass Turf irrigated using typical pop-up sprinklers: 8 – 10 minutes three times per week.
- ✓ Drip irrigation for Plants: 15 – 25 minutes two times per week. These times are for ornamental type plants. Native or xeriscape plants will require less.

Drip irrigation for Trees: 25 – 30 minutes one

- ✓ time per week. These times are for ornamental type trees. Native or xeriscape trees will require less.

Please remember that these are general recommendations and depending on your system you may need to adjust watering times up or down. Also, if we do receive rain then irrigation can be suspended until the soil dries.

Turf Fertilization for the Bermuda grass should be completed once every six to eight weeks on average using fertilizer containing at least 16-20% Nitrogen. Apply following the label and make sure to water in for a few minutes after application. Do not fertilize Bermuda grass if you plan on overseeding with Rye grass in the coming month.