



Virginia Cooperative Extension

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April Tips

LAWNS AND LANDSCAPING

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- If runoff is a problem in your landscape, lawns established with turfgrass sod are up to 15 times more effective in controlling runoff than seed-established lawns, even after three years.
- Warm-season grasses, including bermudagrass, zoysia grass, and centipedegrass, should be fertilized with 1 pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet of quickly available nitrogen fertilizers (with less than 50 percent slowly available nitrogen). This application should be repeated in May and June.
- Bluegrass uses the most water of the lawn grasses. Fescues are between ryegrass and bluegrass in water consumption.
- Control lawn weeds now through late May before they get large and temperatures get too high to apply herbicides safely.
- The first grass clippings of the season are rich in nutrients and contain fewer weed seeds than those collected later. Put them in the compost pile or mow frequently and leave them on the ground.
- Where flower gardens or window boxes are visible from indoors, select flowers in colors to complement your curtains or porch decor.
- An important principle of garden design to remember is to have your plants in groups large enough to form masses of color or texture. As a rule, five or seven plants set in a grouping to form an irregular shape create the desired effect. A large delphinium or peony may be of sufficient size to be attractive alone, but a random collection of individual, small- to medium- sized plants will yield a disorganized appearance.
- A well-designed berm or man-made hill is a landscape asset. Even a low berm adds considerable interest on a flat property. A berm will provide screening for privacy, deflect and absorb noise or redirect wind or water flow where necessary. It can also improve the microclimate for plants; its south side staying warmer, the north side cooler.
- A tall, evergreen hedge north of your home can cut heating bills by 34 percent in windswept regions or by 10% in sheltered areas. If your house is exposed to winter winds, this spring, consider establishing an evergreen planting for a windbreak.
- Many herbs are excellent for natural-appearing rock gardens or formal plantings with brick pathways. These herbs do well in sandy soil and are partial to full-sun locations: creeping thyme, sage, santolina and garlic.

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- Estimate your grass seed needs at 2 to 3 pounds of bluegrass seed or 4 to 8 pounds tall fescue per 1000 square feet. Remove debris, level and firm soil before seeding. Cover seed by raking the area lightly.
- Do not mow the lawn until it has grown at least two inches. The roots are being renewed in the spring and grass needs vigorous top growth initially.
- Plant grass seed to fill in bare spots in your lawn. Loosen the soil to a depth of one-half inch with a spade or rake. Sow a good-quality seed with a low percentage of weed content and a high germination rate. Spread the seed liberally and work it in lightly. Use a fertilizer designed to encourage root development in new lawn areas. Gently water the newly seeded area. Keep it moist, but not flooded. Use a mulch, such as straw, to retain moisture.
- Lawn grasses do best if mowed at the correct height:
 - Kentucky Bluegrass 1½ to 2½"
 - Tall Fescue 1½ to 3"
 - Creeping Red Fescue 2 to 3"
 - Perennial Rye Grass 1½ to 2½"
 - Bermudagrass ½ to 1"
 - Zoysia Grass ¾ to 1"
- Once the snow melts and the surface is dry, established (but uneven) lawns will benefit from being rolled. Depressed areas may be filled with shifted topsoil. Fill in the sparser areas by sowing new seed.
- The lawn mower blade should always be sharp so as not to tear the grass. If you sharpen the blade at home, be sure to balance it, too. Place the center hole of the blade on a screwdriver handle held upright in the vise. Check to see if it balances. If not, sharpen the heavier side some more until the blade balances on the handle.
- Remove sticks, rocks and other debris from your lawn to prevent damaging your lawnmower or injuring yourself when mowing. Check your lawnmower and other lawn-care equipment in preparation for the coming season.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dom, David Gravell, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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