

Lawn Care Calendar

Tall Fescue

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These suggested maintenance practices will help you care for your lawn throughout the year. Because every site is different due to variations in location, terrain, soil type, condition of lawn, previous lawn care and other factors, adjust these practices and dates to suit your home lawn.

Tall fescue (*Festuca arundinacea*) is a moderate-to-coarse-bladed, heavy-duty grass that tolerates a wide range of soil and shade conditions and has good heat, drought and wear tolerance. Tall fescue has few serious pest problems but is subject to brown patch disease under warm, wet conditions.

Tall fescue grows rapidly and requires frequent mowing in spring and fall but does not tolerate a close cut. Tall fescue has a bunch-type growth habit, does not recover well from injury, and thus must be reseeded if bare areas appear. For more information about seeding, see *Seeding a Lawn in Arkansas*, FSA2113.

Tall fescue can also be harvested and sold as sod. Because tall fescue is not a spreading grass, harvesting tall fescue sod is difficult. Typically, the sod will come with a special netting to help with the harvesting of

the sod or the sod will be a mixed planting of Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), which contains underground rhizomes, and tall fescue to increase sod strength. For more information on locating tall fescue sod, see the *Arkansas Sod Source Directory*, FSA6136.

Before you begin following the lawn maintenance calendar, obtain a soil test. A soil test provides key information including soil pH, potassium and phosphorous levels. Soil testing is free through county Cooperative Extension Service offices. Proper soil pH is necessary to produce a healthy, high quality, attractive lawn. Tall fescue prefers a soil with a pH from 5.8 to 6.5 but will tolerate a range of soil pH. For more information about soil pH in lawns see *Liming Your Lawn*, FSA6134.

New cultivars referred to as turf-type tall fescues have been developed. These cultivars are more shade tolerant, finer leaved, and have a darker green color than the forage K-31 variety. For more information about choosing a cultivar, see *Choosing a Grass for Arkansas Lawns*, FSA2112. Tall fescue can be grown throughout the state but does best in the northern tier of counties.

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Tall fescue maintenance calendar.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Watering [†]				●	●	●	●	●	●	●		
Mowing			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Fertilization			●	●	●				●	●	●	●
Liming		●	●	●	●				●	●	●	●
Aeration			●	●	●				●	●	●	
Dethatching <i>(not necessary)</i>												
Seeding		●	●	●				●	●	●		
Sodding		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●
Weed control												
Preemergence-crabgrass	●	●	●	●								
Postemergence-broadleaf			●	●	●	●				●	●	●
Postemergence-grasses/sedges					●	●	●	●				

[†] Bullets represent the optimum time period to perform various maintenance practices to your tall fescue lawn. The optimum lawn maintenance period may be started earlier or extended based on variations in annual weather conditions and/or location in Arkansas. Dark bullets represent the best months for each practice, and lightly shaded bullets represent possible months.

	March Through May
Mowing	Tall fescue should be mowed at 2.5 to 4.0 inches. Mow often to avoid removing more than one-third of the leaf blade. It isn't necessary to collect clippings unless they remain as clumps on the lawn surface. Mowing more frequently to avoid clipping buildup is more efficient than emptying the collection bag. For more information about mowing, see <i>Mowing Your Lawn</i> , FSA6023.
Fertilizing	Do not fertilize tall fescue after May 1 in spring. Apply 1.0 pound of nitrogen per thousand square feet approximately in March or early April. Submit a soil sample to determine phosphorus and potassium requirements, if you haven't already (contact your county Extension office). Apply lime if suggested. Do not apply more than 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet in the spring. For more information about fertilization, see <i>Fertilizing Your Lawn</i> , FSA2114. For more information about soil pH in lawns, see <i>Liming Your Lawn</i> , FSA6134. To determine the amount of fertilizer product required to apply 1.0 pound of nitrogen per thousand square feet, divide 1.0 by the first number (%) in the fertilizer ratio. For example, for a 20-5-5 fertilizer (containing 20% nitrogen), divide 1.0 by 0.20 (NOTE: 20% = 0.20). The result is 5 pounds of product per thousand square feet. For more information on calculating the amount of fertilizer you need to apply, see <i>Fertilizing Your Lawn</i> , FSA2114.
Watering	Irrigation is seldom needed during the spring except for newly sodded areas or if dry, hot, windy conditions occur for an extended period. A dark, bluish gray color, foot-printing and wilted or curled leaves indicate that it is time to water. Proper irrigation may prevent or reduce pest problems and environmental stress later in the summer.
Weed Control	Apply preemergence herbicides to control crabgrass. Apply from late February to early March. See FSA2109, <i>Home Lawn Weed Control</i> , for more weed control information.
Insect Control	Check for insect pests and treat if necessary.
Thatch Removal	It is not necessary to remove thatch.
Aerification	Core aerify compacted areas as needed to improve rooting, water infiltration and soil aeration.

June Through August	
Mowing	Tall fescue should be mowed every 5 to 7 days and less often when the lawn is drought stressed. Set your mower at 3.0 inches or higher during the summer to help reduce stress.
Fertilizing	Do not fertilize tall fescue at this time.
Watering	Either water as needed to prevent drought or allow the lawn to go dormant. About 1 inch of water per application each week is adequate for irrigated lawns. Sandy soils often require more frequent watering, or about 0.5 inch of water every third day. Do not discontinue irrigation in midsummer. Water dormant lawns every 3 weeks if it doesn't rain. Water to wet the soil to a soil depth of 4 to 6 inches. Probe with a screwdriver to determine moisture depth. It is often necessary to irrigate an area for 3 to 5 hours to apply 1 inch of water. (It requires 620 gallons of water to deliver 1 inch of water per thousand square feet.) Because clay soils accept water slowly, irrigate just until runoff occurs, wait one-half hour until the water has been absorbed, and then continue irrigating until the desired depth or amount is obtained. A dark, bluish gray color, foot-printing and wilted, folded or curled leaves indicate that it is time to water. Proper irrigation may prevent or reduce pest problems and environmental stress later in the summer.
Disease Control	Check for brown patch disease. Achieving control of brown patch with fungicides is difficult at best. A better approach is to improve drainage and air movement and carefully manage nitrogen fertilization and irrigation. Reduce nitrogen fertilization to a minimum and avoid overwatering. For more information about brown patch, see <i>Brown Patch of Tall Fescue Lawns</i> , FSA7558.
Weed Control	Avoid the use of herbicides at this time.
Insect Control	Check for insect pests and treat if necessary.
September Through November	
Mowing	Tall fescue should be mowed every 5 to 7 days and less often when the lawn is drought stressed. If you raised your mowing height during the summer, you may gradually lower the mower back to the desired height.
Fertilizing	Fertilize with 1.0-1.5 pound(s) of actual nitrogen (N) per thousand square feet in mid-September and again in November (about the time the grass is green but not actively growing). Apply lime if suggested. Submit soil samples for analysis every 2-3 years to determine your lawn's nutrient requirements. Be sure to specify your lawn species.
Watering	Irrigation will often be necessary in September but needed infrequently the remainder of the fall. Tall fescue may still need to be watered periodically when dry, windy weather prevails. Continue to irrigate as needed by following the June through August guidelines.
Weed Control	Apply broadleaf herbicides to control dandelions and other weeds if necessary. Caution: Some herbicides may affect newly seeded turf. Do not apply 2-way or 3-way postemergence, broadleaf herbicides containing 2,4-D, dicamba, mecoprop or triclopyr until seedlings have been mowed at least three times. Follow label directions.
Insect Control	Check for insect pests and treat if necessary.
Renovation	Overseed thin, bare areas as grass begins to respond to cooler temperatures in September and early October. Use a blend of tall fescue cultivars at 8-10 pounds per thousand square feet. Apply a starter-type (high phosphorus) fertilizer at time of seeding if soil tests indicate a need. Keep the seedbed moist with light, frequent sprinklings several times a day to ensure good germination.
Aerification	Core aerify compacted areas as needed to improve rooting, water infiltration and soil aeration.
Leaf Removal	Leaf removal is key to turf maintenance. Remove fallen leaves promptly in order to decrease shade on turf.
December Through February	
Mowing	Remove lawn debris (rocks, sticks and leaves). Mow as often as needed.
Fertilizing	Do not fertilize.
Watering	Tall fescue may still need to be watered periodically when dry, windy weather prevails.
Weed Control	Apply broadleaf herbicides as necessary for control of chickweed, henbit or other weeds.
Leaf Removal	Leaf removal is key to turf management. Remove fallen leaves promptly in order to decrease shade on turf.

Additional Information

Additional fact sheets available at <http://www.uaex.edu>

Additional information about turfgrass management available at <http://turf.uark.edu>

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