

HOME GROUNDS FACT SHEET



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Bluegrass Lawns

Kentucky bluegrasses are a group of widely-used, cool-season grasses in New York State. They are referred to as “cool season” because they prefer optimum temperatures of 60½ to 75½F. When properly cared for, Kentucky bluegrasses can provide one with a thick, richly textured lawn that adds greatly to the overall picture and value of the landscape. Turf-type bluegrasses adapt well to moist, well drained, fertile soils with a pH in the near neutral range.

Kentucky bluegrasses are a prime constituent of many sods. The knitting action of its rhizomes or underground shoots hold the grass plants together, allowing it to be harvested 12 to 18 months after seeding.

Some of the turf-type varieties of improved perennial ryegrasses are quite compatible with many of the Kentucky bluegrasses. This gives a lawn greater wear, drought and disease tolerances. See Home Grounds Fact Sheet C-1-8 for the names of new improved turf-type perennial ryegrass varieties.

With a few exceptions bluegrasses are generally not shade tolerant. This should be taken into consideration when selecting grasses for shady sites. Fine fescues and tall fescue are generally more adaptive. They can be mixed with a bluegrass to give it more adaptability to shaded areas. Bluegrasses can be blended by using two or more bluegrass varieties. It is a general practice to use more than one variety of any grass.

Liming

Bluegrasses and most other turf-type grasses prefer the soil pH in the 6.3 to 6.8 range. This is very important since there is the greatest availability of essential turfgrass nutrients when the pH is in this range. If the soil pH is below 6.3, limestone should be added to bring it in the proper range. Soils should be tested yearly, preferably in the fall, and the appropriate amount of limestone applied. Soil tests can be done by Cornell Cooperative Extension or some garden centers. The Cornell soil pH test kit can be purchased from your local Cornell Cooperative Extension office so you can do many accurate tests yourself.

Fertilizing

A lawn fertilizer for an established lawn should contain nitrogen and potassium at a ratio of 2:1. Only apply one pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet. Fertilize with a slow or controlled release fertilizer. One can determine if the fertilizer is fast, medium, slow or controlled release type by dividing the Water Insoluble Nitrogen (W.I.N.) number on the bag by the first number on the fertilizer label. If we were using a 10-6-4 fertilizer and the W.I.N. number was 3.0, we would divide 10 (first number on the fertilizer bag) into 3 and get .3, then multiply .3 x 100 to get 30. Our final number is 30, and that tells us that it is a slow release fertilizer. If that number is between 15-29, then it would be considered medium. Below 15 it would be a fast release fertilizer. If there is no W.I.N. number, look for the words “slow release.”

Lawns should be fertilized 2 to possibly 3 times a year depending on grass type and desired results. The optimum times to fertilize a lawn are late May (around Memorial Day) and early September (around Labor Day). Apply one (1) pound of actual nitrogen per thousand square feet per application for a total of two (2) pounds of actual nitrogen per thousand square feet per year. You will sometimes see the recommendation written as 1#N/1000sq.ft./application. Use a slow or controlled release fertilizer. Early spring applications at full rate are not usually recommended as this can result in excessive shoot growth at the expense of root growth. Over-fertilized spring fed lawns are more stressed going into hot, dry summers because their roots have grown less. On some occasions, spring fertilization is necessary, depending on the condition of the lawn after the winter, to promote increased turf density. An increase in turf density allows the grass to compete for space before summer weeds emerge. **Ideal spring fertilization rates would be one quarter to one half full rate or 1/4–1/2 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet.**

C-1-3 MTC:cms revised RT 5/08

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Watering

Bluegrasses require adequate moisture, especially during hot, dry summer periods. Without irrigation at summer stress times, most lawns will brown out, although they will probably start to green up again with the onset of moisture and cooler temperatures. Less fertilizer should be used on unirrigated lawns. When there isn't adequate rainfall, it is best to water one to two inches per week (measured with a can or rain gauge). Sandy soils may require more frequent irrigation. For information on irrigation systems, consult fact sheet C-1-34 and D-1-35. Be sure to abide by both local and Nassau County lawn sprinkling regulations.

Lack of adequate water is a major cause of decline of summer lawns. Walking across the lawn and seeing your footprints in the turf is the first sign of water stress. If water isn't applied the grass turns a dark smoky gray color. Sidewalks, roads and south slopes usually dry out first.

When renovating a lawn, the addition of large amounts of organic matter tilled into the soil can help to reduce the need for irrigation. Many municipalities offer free compost. Call your town to see if you can get some.

Mowing

Mowing grass too short ruins many good lawns. For most bluegrasses, the mower should be set at about 3 inches and remain that way throughout the growing season. Mow grass whenever there is new growth of about one-half to one inch or so to cut. By following this practice, many lawn problems can be avoided. Most of the year you can leave short clippings where they fall.

They will return some nutrients to the soil. If clippings are long or if you delay mowing so long that clumps of clippings remain on the lawn the day after you mow, be sure to rake them up or they will smother the grass and cause yellow or dead areas. Recycle these clippings elsewhere. If you are in the market for a lawn mower, consider one that has a mulching capacity. Sharpen mower blades regularly.

Varieties

If you live on Long Island and you love bluegrass, summer patch and drought are your number one enemies. If you have no irrigation and cut your grass at a 2-2.5 inch height, there are no summer patch resistant varieties recommended, but for color, leaf texture and drought recovery you may want to try Caliber and Kenblue. If you use a low mowing height, i.e. 1-1.5" (we don't recommend this) and you irrigate to prevent stress, Princeton 105, Showcase, Apollo, Chicago and Seabring all came out on top for summer patch resistance. Platini and America can also be summer patch resistant provided a full 3-4 lbs of nitrogen per year is applied. Additionally, Princeton and Chicago have the best wear tolerance. Nimbus and Kenblue came out on the bottom for summer patch resistance in this category. Bump your mowing height up to greater than 2.5" and you can add Eclipse and Haga to the list of summer patch resistant varieties. Haga also resists annual blue grass invasions. Because of the prevalence of summer patch and its devastating and recurrent damage, always choose a variety with a greater degree of summer patch resistance over all other characteristics.