



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Fescue Lawn Care Tips for Fall (October 10, 2020)

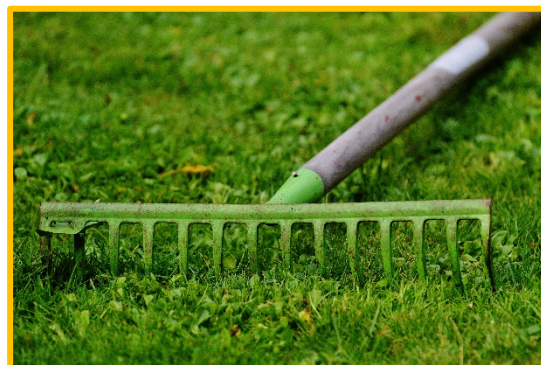
by Michelle Le Strange, UCCE Master Gardener Advisor, Emeritus

With summer fading away everyone will be spending more time outside enjoying the cooler fall weather. So now is a good time to prep the lawn for increased play and a better visual display. Shorter days and longer nights allow soil temperatures to cool resulting in a flush of lawn root and shoot growth. With a "little extra care" your tired fescue lawn can look totally refreshed in just a few weeks.

Lawn maintenance has become so routine and mechanical it is almost like we forget that a lawn is thousands of live plants growing side by side. We almost expect lawns to behave like a woven carpet, like they are synthetic. We mow on our schedule and we mow too low, we water with bad sprinkler systems, and we are not sure when and how much to fertilize. Well it is time to put the "care" back into Lawn Care.

IF YOUR FESCUE LAWN NEEDS HELP

1) **Do a one time "Mow Low followed by Raking"**. If there are dead areas of lawn, a thick thatch layer, and green grass blades that are lying on their sides, then it might be time for a mini lawn renovation. Normally tall fescue lawns should be mowed to a height of 1.5 to 2.0 inches (2.0 to 3.0 inches in the summer). To rejuvenate your lawns mow them slightly lower than usual so that afterwards you can drag a metal tine garden rake over the surface to remove the dead grass and expose more soil. This is when you decide if you need to re-seed some areas of the fescue lawn.



2) **Reduce Soil Compaction**. Healthy roots are the key to a thriving lawn but getting roots to grow deep is no easy task. Almost all lawns in our valley and foothills are struggling to grow in hard undernourished soil. Soil compaction is caused by foot traffic and equipment and every now and then compacted soils need to be "uncompacted".

Most turf compaction is in the top 3-inches of soil with the top 1-inch the worst! The remedy is to remove soil cores that are approximately one-half inch in diameter and 3-inches long. This practice is called aerating, aerifying, or coring. Aeration restores the balance of air and water in the soil, which are needed for healthy roots.

For small lawns, a hand aerifier, consisting of hollow tubes on a stirrup pushed in the soil by foot, is sufficient. For large or extremely compacted lawns, a machine-driven aerifier can be rented, or the aerification can be performed by a lawn maintenance company. You will need to water the area and wait until the moisture drains sufficiently, so you can punch the aerator into the soil and have the cores stay intact upon removal. Aerate first, then re-seed.

- 3) **Determine your Weed Control Plan.** If you have lots of spurge, oxalis, and other broadleaf weeds present in your lawn, you should consider using a **postemergent herbicide for broadleaf weeds** at this time. There are many good products on the store shelves. If you only have a few weeds, then spend a few moments and hand pull them before they flower and seed.



If your lawn is thick and you do not plan to re-seed any areas then you may wish to apply a **preemergent herbicide for winter weed control**. Now is the best time for products like Scott's Halts (pendimethalin), Amaze (benefin and oryzalin), Dimension (dithiopyr), Weed Impede (oryzalin), and a few others to prevent winter grass and broadleaf weeds from sprouting in your lawn. Be aware that these materials will also prevent desirable lawn seed from germinating and emerging for about three months. That is why you must decide if you are adding more grass seed to your lawn or not before considering a preemergent.

- 4) **Topdress with fertilizer and a thin layer of compost.** Tilling compost into soil helps to enrich it, but did you know that topdressing compost on your lawn can help revitalize them? An application of fertilizer now improves fescue's fall flush of growth. Compost that contains manure or another nitrogen fertilizer source will release nutrients slowly over time and give it that deep dark green color and keep it looking lush longer. It doesn't take much, about one-quarter ($\frac{1}{4}$) inch evenly distributed over the top of the lawn brings significant results. Just toss it out by the shovelful, and smooth it out with a rake. Besides the nutritional aspects compost contains micro-organisms that help break down thatch that builds up naturally in lawns.



- 5) **Check the sprinkler system and water deeply.** Save up some tuna or cat food cans and spread them out over the lawn, then turn on the sprinklers. Afterwards measure the water in the cans and see how uniformly your sprinklers apply water. You may need to buy a few new nozzle tips or fix some worn sprinkler heads. Afterwards water deeply to move the fertilizer, compost, or preemergence herbicide into the soil or to germinate the newly seeded grass areas.

Within a few weeks you'll notice your "little extra care" showing up in your lawn!

In accordance to the Shelter-at-Home guidelines, the Master Gardeners have cancelled all public events at this time, but if you send us an email or leave a message on our phone lines, someone will call you back!

Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325; Kings County at (559) 852-2736

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