



# Basic Home Lawn Care

Lawns are losing favor in California due to continued drought. However, a small amount of lawn can be useful for recreation, children, or pets.

## Lawn Species

Most lawns in California were planted with Kentucky bluegrass species that looks great during cool weather, but doesn't tolerate hot summers unless given large amounts of water. This grass is no longer recommended as an option.

## Cool or Warm Season Grass

If you are planting a new lawn, we recommend choosing one of the following types:

- Bermudagrass (warm)
- Tall fescue (cool)
- Hard fescue (cool)

## Bermudagrass

Bermudagrass is a warm season grass that dies back in winter. It does not tolerate shade. When temperatures drop below 50 degrees, it turns brown. However, it can be overseeded in fall with Kentucky bluegrass to keep it

green during winter. In spring, Bermudagrass greens up again.

## Tall fescue

Tall fescue is a cool season grass that looks great during cool weather. It is drought tolerant, but needs more summer water than bermudagrass. However, it uses less water than a Kentucky bluegrass lawn.

## Hard fescue

Hard or fine fescue is a cool season grass that doubles as a no-mow option for gardeners that want a natural look, as it can reach 4-6 inches tall and tends to fall over. They do not tolerate mowing.

Hard fescue is not used for recreation, and is best used in more ornamental areas. It needs less fertilizers than other lawns.

Although drought tolerant, hard fescue may turn brown in summer if not given enough water. They are also shade tolerant.

## Lawn for Shady Areas

Lawns need 4-5 hours of full sun, or an entire day of

filtered light. Lawns in deep shade often have disease problems because of reduced light.

Signs that your lawn is not thriving in shade include the development of overly fine leaf blades.

There are lawn mixes on the market that are especially blended for shady conditions.

To allow more sunlight to reach your lawn, selectively prune tree branches. See our publication "Trees in the Home Garden" for more information.

## Sprinklers

We do not recommend planting a lawn without first installing an irrigation system that's on a timer.

## Planting Time

It can be tempting to put a lawn in during hot weather if your grass looks bad, but it's best to wait until fall. You can still plant lawn in spring but it will have less time to become established before weather turns warm.

## Preparing Your Site

Before investing time and money in installing a lawn,

make sure the soil is well-prepared.

Irrigate the area to allow weeds to germinate. When weeds reach 1" tall, remove them. Repeat this two more times.

If soil is compacted or needs amending, add 2-3 inches of compost and till it into a depth of 3 inches. They may bring up more weed seeds. If it does, irrigate the area and remove the weeds again.

## Seed vs Sod

Either choice has the same amount of preparation. Planting from seed is less costly but takes more time. Planting sod has a higher cost but doesn't take as much time to install and care for.

## Planting from Seed

Measure the area to be planted to determine the total amount of seed needed. Spread seed using a drop, broadcast, or handheld spreader. Cover seeds with 1/16" to 1/8" of compost, then rake it in and use a roller to lightly firm the soil. Keep the soil moist during the germination period (usually 1-

2 weeks) by applying frequent, but light irrigation.

## Lawn Watering

Once your lawn is installed, you'll need to water it more in the beginning until it gets established. Lawn is shallow rooted, so it does not need deep water. Turn on sprinklers for 10 minutes, then check to see how deep water has penetrated. Water should penetrate to a depth of at least 2-3". If it does not, set the timer for longer. If water begins to run off, cut the time in half and run it in separate cycles several hours apart.

## Fertilizer

If your lawn appears green, then it is healthy and does not need fertilizer. Lawns that are yellow-green or yellow in color may benefit from fertilization.

Avoid using fertilizer on Bermudagrass lawns during dormancy or hot periods. Adding fertilizer won't help them "green up" and can cause plant stress.

## Mowing and Edging

### Lawn

Set your mower blade to the correct height for your lawn type. Do not mow more than 1/3 of your lawn at a time, as this damages the grass blades and decreases the health of the lawn. To mow, set your mower at:

- Bermudagrass: ½ to 1 inch
- Bluegrass and fescue: 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches

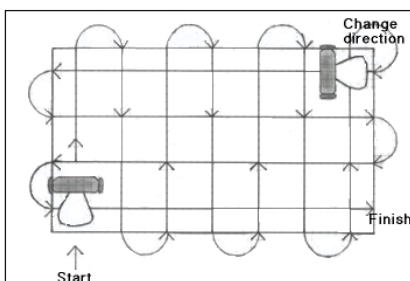
Bermudagrass spreads by stems that can easily invade other areas of your yard; edge your lawn regularly to prevent this.

## Grasscycling

Grasscycling is a method that uses grass clippings to keep your lawn naturally fertilized. Simply mow your lawn without using a bag and leave the clippings. They will break down and supply nitrogen.

Contrary to popular belief, grasscycling does not create thatch problems. Thatch is a layer of living and dead grass stems and roots that accumulate over time. Dethatch your lawn to avoid this problem.

Before you grasscycle, make sure your lawnmower has a safety flap that covers the opening where the bag fits into the chute. If not, purchase a retrofit kit from the dealer of your particular brand of mower. If you are looking for a new lawn mower, there are "mulching mowers" available on the market.



Pattern for sowing seed

## **Bibliography and Additional Information Sources**

UC ANR: "Turfgrass Selection for the Home Landscape"

UC ANR: "Mowing Your Yard and Grasscycling"

UC ANR: "Lawn Watering Guide for California"

UC ANR: "Managing Turfgrasses During Drought"

UC IPM: "UC Guide to Healthy Lawns Planting Rates and Times

<https://ipm.ucanr.edu/TOOLS/TURF/SITEPREP/sdtimert.html>

UC ANR Publication 8391: "No-Mow Fineleaf Fescue Grasses for California Landscapes"

Garden Notes Sacramento: "Lawn Removal Guide"

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