

Recovering from the 'Good Old Summertime'

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If you lost a portion of your lawn to the summer's drought, don't despair. There's still time to repair or replant with sod or plugs. The key to their survival is to not allow them to become dry during winter.

While it's fine to plant sod or plugs in fall, it's too late to seed warm-season turfgrasses such as bermudagrass. The seeds will certainly germinate, but their chance of surviving the winter is slim. However, it's fine to seed cool-season turfgrasses such as tall fescue.

If you're re-establishing a tall fescue lawn, plant seeds at 6 to 8 pounds per 1,000 square feet. If you're overseeding an existing tall fescue lawn to thicken it up, plant at a rate of 2 to 3 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

Here are some other tips on helping your lawn recover from summer stress:

- Thicken a warm-season turfgrass with proper cultural practices. The most important one this time of year is mowing at the recommended height and frequency to encourage turfgrass plants to grow horizontally instead of vertically. See the chart, across, for recommended mowing heights that encourage the recovery of warm-season turfgrasses: bermuda, St. Augustine, centipede, zoysia and buffalograss.

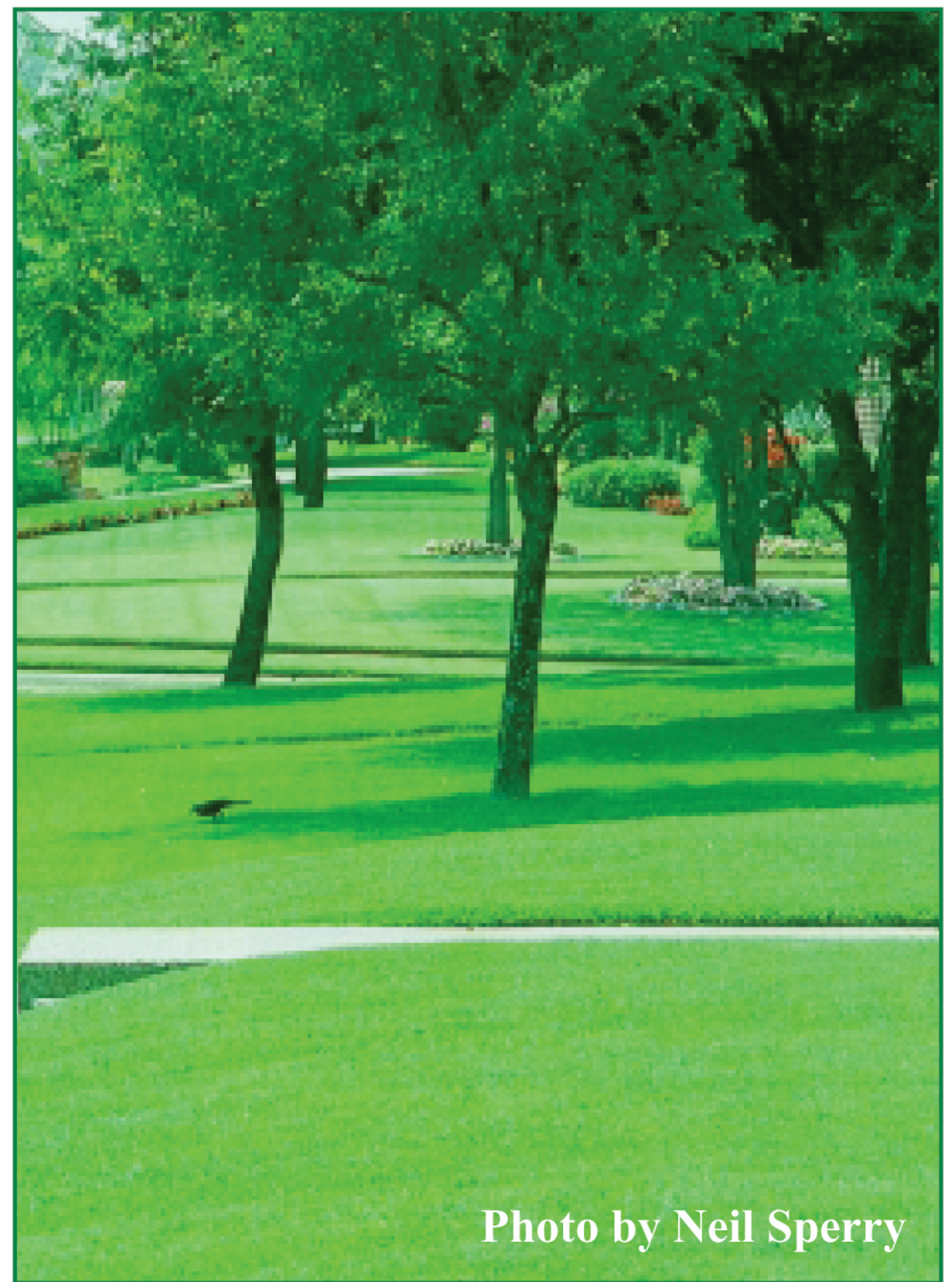


Photo by Neil Sperry

Fall Lawn Care Chart

Recommended mowing heights for fall recovery of turfgrass plants.

Turfgrass Type	Mowing Height (inches)
Common bermudagrass	1 to 1½
Hybrid bermudagrass	¾ to 1
St. Augustinegrass	2 to 2½
Centipedegrass	1 to 1½
Zoysiagrass	½ to 1
Tall Fescue	2 to 2½
Bluegrass	2 to 2½
Buffalograss	2 to 3

- Mow more often in fall. Most homeowners mow their lawns once a week. By increasing the mowing frequency to twice a week at this time of year, you'll force the turfgrass to spread faster.
- Where possible, water all lawn areas thoroughly. Do not, however, overwater your landscape. Excess moisture will discourage healthy growth, and it will prevent turfgrass plants from spreading faster. Warm-season turfgrasses, especially bermuda, don't grow well

in waterlogged soils. Deep, infrequent irrigation is still the best recommendation.

- Fertilize your lawn. Turfgrass plants respond well to fall fertilization. Unless soil test results for your lawn indicate otherwise, use a 3-1-2 or 4-1-2 formula fertilizer. Ideal rate of nitrogen for a warm-season turfgrass this time of year is 3/4 to 1 1/2 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet. For cool-season turfgrasses, apply fertilizer through late November to early December.

Is Your Lawn Damaged? Here's How It May Have Happened

The summer of '98 proved to be one of the harshest on record when it comes to stressing lawns in Texas. In addition to the extended drought, high temperatures both day and night placed tremendous stress on turfgrass plants in landscapes throughout the state. Adding to the problem were water restrictions mandated in many towns and cities.

The net result: loss of portions of lawns or, in some cases, total loss of lawns. Even lawns that survived the summer of '98 were severely affected. How well they're cared for now will have a tremendous impact on whether — and how — they'll survive the winter of 1998 - 1999.

Proper fall cultural practices are always important, but they're especially important this year. Practice what the experts preach if you want your lawn to survive the cold winter temperatures that are just around the corner.

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