

Hort Short **Snohomish County Master Gardener** **Lawns** **Issue#**

Lawns -an ecosystem to care for

Like forests or prairie grasslands, lawns are dynamic ecosystems: They are communities of plants, soil, microbes, insects and earthworms where birds can feed. It is easy to have a healthy, beautiful lawn in the Pacific Northwest without pesticides and fertilizer runoff and without wasting water.

Types of Grasses that Thrive in Washington State

- Kentucky bluegrasses, in general, are **not** well adapted to western Washington's soil and climate but grow well in eastern Washington.
- Turf-type perennial ryegrasses are well adapted to both western and eastern Washington. In general, they have greater wear resistance than any other type of grass adapted to this region.
- Fine-leaved fescues are popular for home lawns because they start growing early and blend well with turf-type perennial ryegrasses, bentgrasses, and Kentucky bluegrasses.
- Turf-type tall fescues may be better adapted to poorly drained soils, shady areas, soils with higher contents of soluble salts, and areas that receive minimal irrigation during the summer.
- Other grasses: Do not plant Zoysia, Bermuda, dichondra, centipede, carpet, St. Augustine, and mondo grasses in Washington lawns. These grasses are not adapted to Washington's climate.

Natural Yard Care - The natural way to a beautiful, healthy lawn in 6 easy-care steps:

1. **Mow higher**, regularly, and leave the clippings, which act as free fertilizer.
 - Set mowing height between 2 and 3 inches; remove only one-third of grass length.
 - Keep the lawnmower blades sharp; mow when the grass is dry and a little more often in spring.
2. **Test your soil**. If the test shows you need added fertilizer, use a "natural organic" or "slow-release" fertilizer in September or May. To protect waterways, choose no-phosphorus fertilizers for established lawns.
3. **Water deeply** and less frequently, or let lawns go dormant in the summer.
 - Lawns need 1 inch of water per week in summer.
 - Place tuna cans around the lawn when watering and time how long it takes the sprinkler to fill them to 1 inch.
 - Water early in the morning or late in the day to reduce evaporation.
4. **Improve poor lawns** with aeration, overseeding, and compost topdressing.
 - Aerate compacted soil in spring or fall to improve root development.
 - Overseed with rye/fescue mix designed for Northwest conditions.
 - Topdress with 1/4 – 1/2 inch compost.

5. **Avoid using** “weed and feed” and other pesticides; use less-toxic alternatives.
 - Accept a few “weeds” in your lawn; remove problem weeds by hand in the spring and fall.
 - Crowd out weeds and reduce pest damage by growing a healthy, vigorous lawn.
 - If a pesticide is needed:
 - Spot-spray problem weeds with the least toxic product.
 - Read product labels carefully and follow the instructions.
 - Dispose of excess product at your county Hazardous Waste Facility.
6. **Consider alternatives** to lawns in shady areas, on slopes and near waterways.
 - Leave a buffer of natural vegetation near streams and lakes.
 - For best results, grow grass on well-drained soil in full sun or partial shade.
 - Use “sheet mulching” to convert lawns to beds.
 - Cover lawn areas with layers of newspaper or cardboard, then 3 to 6 inches of compost and/or wood chips.
 - Wait a few months and once the grass is dead, dig holes through the mulch to plant shrubs; or till the compost and dead sod into the soil for planting beds.

Resources:

Home Lawns. Washington State University, EB0482E. [EB0482E.pdf \(wsu.edu\)](#)

Natural Lawn Care for Western Washington. Printed by Snohomish County December 2015. Contributors include: Snohomish County Conservation District, Washington State University, Snohomish County Extension, Snohomish County Public Works Surface Water Management, and Puget Sound Starts Here. [Natural Lawn Care for Western Washington \(seattle.gov\)](#)

P S – 11_2020