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With school back in session and football back in full swing, it must mean that the days are getting shorter.

It is a reminder that it is time to prepare lawns for autumn and winter.

Before adjusting the mower height and dragging out the fertilizer spreader, consider the type of turf in the yard, the different care needs and deadlines that come with cool season turf. Kentucky bluegrass and various forms of fescue respond well to cooler weather with added vigor and wonderful color.

Great pride as well as time, money and effort are invested in home lawns in our area. By following some simple lawn maintenance steps, quality lawns can be achieved without spending large amounts of money.

Recommendations for bluegrass and fescue are fairly similar. There are some slight differences that will be noted under each section for specific care instructions.

Here are some of those simple steps to consider.

Watering Tips

Even though cooler weather has arrived, a quality watering schedule needs to continue to

reduce drought stress and improve fertilizer use in the lawn.

Two to three long, deep watering applications each week is more beneficial to the lawn compared to short daily watering schedules.

To test how much water is being applied, simply place clean, empty tuna cans that have been marked with the inches on the side of the can in random areas of the lawns where the water is being applied.

After the watering is over, measure the amount of water in the can to see if the watering program is evenly applying water on the entire lawn.

For bluegrass lawns, apply one inch of water per week from September through November. Fescue lawns will need one to 1.5 inches of water per week during the same period.

Mowing

During the summer, mower height should be set around three inches to help remove some new turf growth without heat stressing the lawn.

With cooler weather approaching, it is time to start lowering the mower height to help prepare the lawn for winter.

For bluegrass varieties, lower the mower height to two inches from Sept. 1 through Oct. 15.

For fescue lawns, gradually lower the mower height to 2.5 inches between Sept. 1 and the last mowing in mid-November.

Weed Control

Fall is the preferred time to apply lawn herbicides to reduce perennial broadleaf weed populations in the next growing year.

Many herbicides can be found as a pre-emergent that can be applied with a fertilizer spreader. These herbicide products should be applied on bluegrass and fescue lawns between Sept. 15 and Oct. 31.

As always, read and follow all herbicide and fertilizer product labels.

Fertilizer

Fall is a great time to fertilize bluegrass and fescue lawns. Before applying fertilizer, measure the area of the lawn that will be fertilized to find the total area.

Recommendations will be written in pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet of area.

Second, check the fertilizer spreader that will be used to ensure that it is opening and closing the granule bin at the various settings correctly to help ensure the correct application rate.

Many of the lawn fertilizers will include the proper fertilizer setting on various spreaders on the product bag to help simplify the application process.

For bluegrass lawns, apply one pound of actual nitrogen fertilizer per 1,000 square feet of lawn area between Sept. 1-15.

Slow release nitrogen fertilizer sources are recommended to help with even release and use of the nitrogen over a longer period of time in the lawn.

Fescue lawns should receive one pound of actual nitrogen fertilizer per 1,000 square feet of lawn area between Oct.15 and Nov. 15. Read and follow all fertilizer directions completely to help ensure proper application.

For more information on cool season lawn maintenance, please contact me at dlott2@unl.edu, contact your local University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension Office, or check the turf calendar on the UNL Turf webpage found at www.turf.unl.edu.