

## Fall lawn care tips to avoid problems next year

Thankfully Rawlins County has caught a couple of nice rains in the last few weeks but we are not out of the drought yet. We are at less than half of our average rainfall for the last 365 days so the soil moisture profile of our top and sub soils is pretty dry also. With that in mind, the importance of proper lawn care going into the winter is important to make sure that your lawn has the best chance to thrive next year.

First, mowing height can be a very important consideration going into a normal winter and is even more so when lawns are already drought stressed. K-State horticulture expert Ward Upham recommends, for cool season grasses like tall fescue and Kentucky bluegrass, keeping the height of your mower the same as what is recommended for the rest of the year instead of leaving it a bit longer for insulation over the winter. For warm season grasses, like buffalo grass, he recommends mowing at the upper end of the recommended height to help the plant store more carbohydrates for winter and to reduce the incidence of cool-weather diseases.

Recommended Mowing Heights (in inches) for Kansas:

- Tall Fescue: 2.5-3.5
- Kentucky Bluegrass: 2-3
- Buffalo Grass: 2-3

Second, even in the winter months, watering your lawn can be beneficial to the plants. Soil supporting any type of lawn should be moist going into winter. If the conditions remain dry, you should keep watering until the ground freezes and if there is a mid-winter thaw, take that opportunity to apply more water and help refill the soil profile with moisture so you're not having to play catch up if the drought persists. Watering is also beneficial to trees and shrubs for the same reason and lack of winter moisture last year combined with the exceptional drought conditions this year have led to many of the tree problems we've seen in the county this year.

Third, determine your fertilizer & herbicide programs and begin planning for next year. At this time of the year, it's not recommended to apply nitrogen fertilizer to warm season grass lawns as they are already done growing until next summer and the nitrogen will just help feed any weeds that are growing in the lawn or be lost through nitrification. Cool season lawns might see a slight benefit in growth through a small application of nitrogen but be aware of soil temperatures dropping far enough that those plants go dormant too. Fall is a good time to work on the pH of your soils and applications of lime or sulfur spread in the winter can often get the time to break down and incorporate into the soils before plants resume growing next spring. For weed control, there are several pre-emergent herbicides that are available to help control lawn weeds that can also be applied this fall.

If you have any questions about lawn care or soil testing, please contact the Rawlins County Extension Office and we will help answer any questions you may have. Some care and management of your lawns this fall and winter can help prevent problems next spring.