

## Fall is the Season for Cool Season Lawn Recovery

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There are lots of cool-season lawns (tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass, and perennial ryegrass either as single species or mixtures) that look like this following the roller coaster of summer weather patterns that featured record heat and drought, followed by moisture from tropical storms, and then a return to more heat and drought. This is the perfect scenario for cool-season lawn struggles in the transition zone. The damage from extremes in heat and moisture are then often exacerbated by disease

and insect pressures that are more likely to attack the stressed turfgrass. Now is the time to plan and implement your lawn recovery strategy.

Here are the principles of some basic recovery strategies, followed by links to extension publications with more details:

- 1) Consider WHY the turf failed? There is no doubt that our weather/climate for the summer is almost always the primary reason for our struggles in the mid-Atlantic transition zone. Extremes in heat and drought are naturally going to wreak havoc on a cool-season turfgrass that prefers moist weather and temperatures in the 70s/50s range. But are there other variables in play on your site such as shade, aspect, traffic, compaction etc.

- 2) Don't forget the importance of the physical and chemical characteristics of your soil. If you have not conducted a soil test within the past 3 years, there is no money better spent than that used for a soil test (you can utilize your local extension office or a private lab to help you conduct and interpret a soil test).
- 3) Was this year a "one off" in the troubles of the cool-season lawn, or is this now becoming a pattern in that every year seems to be posing a challenge in maintaining healthy turf at your site? One thing about extreme damage is that this situation affords you the reason to introduce new genetics into the lawn (use the Recommended Virginia Turfgrass Variety list that you can find on the Virginia Cooperative Extension website for the latest varieties to choose). Given the inherent challenges of growing grass in a climate where NO grass is guaranteed success, don't equate the new genetics with guaranteed success, but do take the opportunity to plant the best materials available based on replicated field trials.
- 4) Is a warm-season grass a better choice for your situation? Maybe, maybe not. Warm-season grasses often have challenges with environmental extremes from the opposite end of the temperature spectrum (i.e. winter cold), but in the warmest areas of Virginia, a warm-season grass (bermudagrass, zoysiagrass, centipedegrass or St. Augustinegrass) might be a better choice for your lawn. While it is not advisable to seed, sprig, or plug these creeping grasses in the fall season, sod installations of either warm-season or cool-season grasses is pretty much possible year-round in most areas of Virginia if the soil has been prepared properly to promote establishment.

Here are some Virginia Cooperative Extension publications to review that provide much greater detail in the steps of planning your fall lawn management programs:

**Cool Season Lawn Renovation**, [https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/en/SPES/SPES-353/SPES-353.html](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/SPES/SPES-353/SPES-353.html)

**2024-25 Virginia Turfgrass Variety Recommendations**,  
[https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/en/SPES/spes-617/spes-617.html](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/SPES/spes-617/spes-617.html)

**Soil Sampling for the Home Gardener**,  
<https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/452/452-129/452-129.html>

**Fall Lawn Care**,  
[https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/en/430/430-520/430-520.html](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/430/430-520/430-520.html)

**Lawn Fertilization in Virginia**, [https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/en/430/430-011/430-011.html](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/pubs_ext_vt_edu/en/430/430-011/430-011.html)