

Do you fertilize your lawn too early?

In addition to fertilizing too early, many homeowners are missing the basics when fertilizing their Florida lawn. Incorrect fertilization can eventually cost you money and your lawn.

In North Florida, your first lawn fertilization for the year should not be until mid April, or even a little later. This allows for the soil in the root area to adequately warm for the most efficient use of the fertilizer. Fertilizing while the root area is too cold, wastes fertilizer and may injure your lawn. A second fertilizer application may be made during summer but not after mid September. A second application for centipedegrass is not usually recommended and can result in centipedegrass decline. More is not always better. If your lawn is healthy in color and density and mowing is required regularly, then additional fertilizer may not be necessary. A bermudagrass lawn may require more frequent fertilization as compared to our other lawn grasses.

In absence of the results of a soil test, choose a lawn fertilizer with equal amounts of nitrogen and potassium and low phosphorus. Look for lawn fertilizers with numbers such as 8-0-8, 10-0-10, 15-0-15, 12-2-14, 13-3-13, 16-2-16 or some similar analysis. The three numbers on a fertilizer bag tell you the percentage of nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) and always in that order (N-P-K). You may also want to choose a lawn fertilizer with at least 1% iron. This will be listed on the back of the fertilizer container. A little iron will provide a darker green lawn without the negative impacts of having to use too much nitrogen to achieve the same color.

You must know the size or area of your lawn when applying almost any lawn chemical, including fertilizer, herbicides, insecticides and fungicides. Most people overdo it when fertilizing their lawn as a result of not knowing the size of their lawn. They simply waste fertilizer and money by applying more fertilizer than is needed. Fertilizer and most lawn pesticides are applied based on square footage. By not knowing the square footage of your lawn, you are playing a guessing game when applying fertilizer and pesticides. Being heavy handed with fertilizer is a common cause for centipedegrass decline.

Take time to accurately measure your lawn, record and save the measurement before spring. Doing so will allow you to purchase and use the correct amount of fertilizer and pesticides. It's best to measure and record the size of your front yard, side yard and backyard separately.

For additional information on how to grow a Florida lawn, contact your County Extension Office or visit <http://yourfloridalawn.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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