

Garden Column for the Salisbury Post
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A few homeowners have started to mow their fescue lawns signaling the beginning of the spring lawn care season. The impending drought has many trying to determine their best course of action for lawn care this spring. The uncertainty of the weather is often a gamble as homeowners must determine how to manage weak and drought damaged lawns.

If we have another dry summer, established lawns must have proper nutrition to survive. Cool season fescue lawns need to continue recommended fertilization schedules this spring. Now is the time to fertilize cool season fescue lawns. Turf specialists recommend one pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet for cool season fescue and fescue blends. Special blended lawn fertilizers with slow release fertilizers are pre measured, usually in 5,000 or 10,000 square foot bags taking the guesswork out of proper fertilization.

Over-seeding fescue this spring is a difficult decision with the current drought situation. Fescue germinates well in the spring, but new lawns often struggle in the summer under normal conditions. Lawns seeded in the fall may still be germinating.

Survivability of fescue seedlings depends on correct seed bed preparation. Those with weak or thin lawns should prepare by lightly tilling bare areas incorporating fertilizers before seeding. Core aeration in the spring is generally not recommended, but when lawns are excessively thin or bare, there's really nothing to lose by coring at this time. Seeds falling into the holes germinate quicker

and have much better chance of survival than seed on top of bare, clay soil.

Straw mulch over seeded areas ensures germination. Tests prove that a thin layer of clean wheat straw helps maintain moisture encouraging quick germination of seed.

Now is also time to control winter weeds such as chickweed, henbit and wild garlic. Winter weeds strongly compete with both established and newly emerging seedlings. Premixed weed killers designed for garden hoses work extremely well. I like them because they require no mixing and the ease of application. Wait a few weeks after grass seedlings emerge before applying weed killers.

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