

## Seeding Tall Fescue in January

If you have bare or thin spots in your lawn, cool-season grasses, like tall fescue, can be dormant seeded over the winter months. Dormant seeding is the process of applying seeds with the intention that they will remain dormant for an extended period and break that dormancy only when weather conditions become ideal for growth.

While fall, is the ideal time to seed tall fescue, it can sometimes be a challenge due to weather extremes. The normal cutoff date for seeding a tall fescue lawn in the fall is October 15<sup>th</sup>. Often our eastern Kansas weather has turned cold or our soils are waterlogged around this date. A wet spring may also prevent you from seeding early and cause potential seeds to miss out on ample spring showers. If you missed the fall window to seed your tall fescue lawn, a dormant seeding may be the opportunity you need to have a lush lawn this summer.

Late November, around Thanksgiving, until March is the ideal time for dormant seeding. Seeds are applied at this time, knowing the seed will not germinate in the cold, winter months. Instead, seedlings will emerge once conditions begin to warm in the early spring. The optimal temperature for tall fescue to germinate is between 59-72 degrees F. Seed applied to lawns in the cold winter months will remain inactive until soils begin to warm to these temperatures.

For optimal germination, as with traditional seeding, soil to seed contact is critical. Remove leaves and other debris to ensure applied seeds will come into contact with bare areas of soil. You may also choose to apply a small amount of topsoil to the seeds to maximize contact and keep seeds in place. If soils are frozen, it is still possible to seed and may even improve soil to seed contact as the soil freezes and thaws, creating cracks for the seeds to lie in.

While dormant seeding can be done anytime between late November-March, later in the winter will result in higher germination. According to a study conducted by K-State specialist Ward Upham, seed that had been dormant seeded in December and January had around 60% of the desired area seeded whereas areas seeded in February and March had closer to 80% coverage. The highest coverage rates occur after a traditional fall seeding, prior to October 15<sup>th</sup>.

Seeding should not occur between October 15<sup>th</sup>- late November. This time in eastern Kansas may be warm enough to cause seeds to germinate without allow them enough time to establish before freezing temperatures set in.

Pay close attention to preemergence herbicides applied in the spring and fall as these can inhibit germination of tall fescue. Preemergence herbicides that can be used in the tall fescue seedbed include siduron (Tupersan) and mesotrione (Tenacity). Weeds should be carefully managed as your new seedlings work to become established to avoid competition for water, light and nutrients. Water too, should be regularly applied as with any other seeding.

Other grasses that are also candidates for dormant seeding as well, including other species of cool-season grasses, buffalograss, and bermudagrass.