

Preparing Your Lawn for Winter

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Central Florida lawns of all types should not be fertilized after late September. Before that time, a fertilizer low in nitrogen should be used. Turf fertilizers high in potassium (the third number on the label) can help to impart some stress tolerance to cold or freezing temperatures and may enhance spring greenup. Do not fertilize your lawn to try to green it up after a freeze – wait for the natural cycle of events to occur in the springtime. Fertilizing after a freeze will do more harm to your lawn, also the Hernando County Fertilizer Ordinance bans homeowner fertilizing of lawns from January 1 to March 31. This black out period should not be a problem because as we mentioned, your lawn will not need to be fertilized during that time of year. The labels on turf fertilizer have even been changed to state that only ‘actively growing turf grass’ should be fertilized.

Winters can be a dry time of year in Central Florida, but if we have an El Nino year there may be plenty of rainfall. Regardless of how much we receive naturally, you should not irrigate your lawn more than once a week, and only then if it is needed. Additional water will not make a dormant lawn grow faster or look greener.

When your lawn begins to grow slower, it doesn’t need to be mowed as often. After the frosts and freezes start you will not need to mow for some time. When you do need to mow again, be sure to cut at the highest recommended height for your grass type. Do not scalp the lawn, as this makes it less able to recover from freeze damage and cutting your lawn too short is one of the fastest ways to kill a lawn. Keep the mowing height high year-round (3.5 to 4” for most St. Augustinegrass cultivars and bahiagrass) for additional enhanced stress tolerance.

Don’t be influenced by lawn care company advertisements that promote their products and services to a nationwide audience. Florida has a very unique climate and what may work in northern states, may not work here. For example, any “weed and feed” product is not recommended by the University of Florida. In Florida, weed control and fertilizing are two different activities that should be done at two different times. By the time we can fertilize in Hernando County, after March 31st, it is usually too warm to apply weed killer. Call a Master Gardener at 352-754-4433 for more advice on spring weed control.

Pushing even a Florida lawn to be green and gorgeous all year long is unrealistic and stressful to the lawn and to you! Let your lawn enjoy its semi-dormancy and it will reward you in the spring!