



Water Efficient Winter Lawns



Fall is coming and that means overseeding season is upon us! It may surprise you to know that more lawns in Chandler are overwatered in the **winter** months than in summer. The option of having a year-round green lawn requires considerable investment in labor, materials and the additional water required. Here are a few tips for establishing a winter lawn this fall. Using techniques from the U of A Karsten Turf Research Center can save you money and help avoid spikes in water consumption.

- Wait to overseed until nighttime temperatures are consistently below 55F - usually mid-October to mid-November.
- Do not fertilize 4 - 6 weeks before overseeding. This will slow the growth of the Bermuda grass.
- 2 weeks before overseeding, cut the watering frequency in half. (Do not shut the water off.)
- If you have a 'smart' irrigation controller, change the setting to manual for your turf stations. Some controllers have an establishment period that you can use during this time.
- Lightly verticut lawn areas to allow seed to contact the soil. Blades should only cut 1/4 inch into the soil - deeper will damage Bermuda stolons and rhizomes.
- "Scalp" the lawn (mow close to the ground). Clippings can be used as a top-dressing after seed is spread.
- Broadcast seed in two directions to achieve even coverage.
- Cover the seed with 1/4 inch of mulch, clippings from scalping or steer manure to help retain moisture.
- Water 3 - 4 times a day with just enough water to keep the top 1/2 inch of soil wet. Seed should germinate in about 7 days.
- When grass is 1- inch tall, reduce watering to once a day.
- After the second mowing, water once every 2 - 3 days to a depth of 4 - 6 inches.
- When lawn is established, usually after the 2nd or 3rd mowing, water once every week.
- If you have ET or 'Smart' controllers, change the setting to "cool season grass". This will take care of watering your winter lawn until late next spring.

The overseeding process is VERY stressful to Bermuda. When this process is repeated year after year, the grass may become so weak that it becomes thin or dies out in patches leaving bare spots when the rye dies in late spring.

An option is to allow your Bermuda lawn to rest or go dormant for the winter season once every 3 – 4 years. In fact, University of Arizona turf specialists agree it's better for the lawn in most cases. This will save you the costs of installation, maintenance and *water*. Non overseeded Bermuda will begin greening up as early as February/March. More tips for overseeding are available at <http://www.chandleraz.gov/default.aspx?pageid=764>

Tip: While Bermuda grass typically goes dormant in the cold months, it is possible to extend the length of its growing season and lush green appearance well into winter. The University of Arizona turf specialists recommend multiple applications of iron (2-4 oz of actual iron per 1000 square feet). Apply the first application about October 1, the next 10 days later and follow up again after another 10 days. Do not apply nitrogen fertilizers. Remember that even dormant Bermuda needs ½ inch of water per month during the winter.

The University of Arizona has been doing trials with coloring dormant Bermuda for the winter. Here is a link to information. <http://gsr.lib.msu.edu/article/whitlark-new-9-21-12.pdf>

Information from University of Arizona Karsten Turfgrass Research Center