



Kelly Feehan

Extension Educator – Community Environment

2715 13th Street, Columbus, NE 68601

[402-563-4901](tel:402-563-4901)

environment.unl.edu

water.unl.edu/stormwater

platte.unl.edu

Twitter: @KellyFeehan2

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I still receive questions about how low to lower the mowing height of lawns in fall or just before lawns go dormant. The idea that the mowing height of lawns should be lower in spring and fall and higher in summer is a mindset that is difficult to change. However, changing the mowing height of lawns is not recommended. The best practice is the “set it and forget it” method for lawn mowing. Set the height at the first mowing in spring and keep it at that height until the last mowing in fall. Mow Kentucky bluegrass at three inches tall and tall fescue at three and one-half inches. Maintaining the same height all season helps with weed control, increases root and rhizome growth, and reduces summer heat stress. Another important practice to follow is mowing often enough so no more than one-third of the grass blade is removed during any one mowing. Mowing more than one-third is called scalping and stresses turfgrass.

Tumble windmill grass has become a prominent weed in lawns. This difficult to control perennial grass is a warm season grass that does well in hot, dry weather. The seed heads somewhat resemble small windmills that tumble across lawns and gardens spreading seed. While seed heads are present now, this is not the time of year to control windmill grass in lawns, other than to cut off seed heads and discard them inside of a trash bag to help reduce the spread of seed. If control is needed in a lawn, the timing to apply herbicides is during the active growth period of windmill grass which typically begins in early June. Once windmill grass greens up next season, apply a herbicide with the chemical mesotrione in it directly onto the weedy grass. One example is a product called Tenacity. Three to four spot applications at 7 to 10 - day intervals next summer will be needed to manage windmill grass in cool season lawns.

Spring flowering bulbs like daffodils, snowdrops, and fritillaria can be planted through October. It is best to plant them after soil temperatures fall below 60 degrees Fahrenheit, but the sooner the better now that it is late October. This will allow roots time to develop before the soil freezes. Dig and plant bulb beds when the soil is fairly dry. Wet soil packs tightly around bulbs and slows root growth. If soil crumbles between your fingers, it is dry enough for digging and planting. Plant bulbs at the recommended depth for the type of bulb. Place bulbs in the hole with the pointed end facing up, then replace and firm soil around bulbs to ensure no large air spaces have formed. Water thoroughly, then in the absence of rainfall, water deeply once a week until the soil freezes. After the soil freezes, add a 3-inch layer of organic mulch, like wood chips, shredded bark, or pine needles over the bulbs to protect them from freezing and thawing.

Garden seed left over after planting can be saved for next year’s garden, usually with little loss in germination. Seed stored for more than one year, however, will require additional care to ensure a fairly high germination rate. Storage life varies with species, but most vegetable seed remains viable for three to four years when stored correctly. Store seeds in tightly sealed glass containers. It is fine to store different types of seeds, in individual paper packets, together in one container. The key is to keep seeds dry and cool. A temperature between 32° and 41°F is best, so a refrigerator can be used to store seeds. A small amount of silica-gel desiccant added to each container will absorb moisture from the air and help keep seeds dry. Craft supply stores sell silica gel in bulk for flower drying. While seeds can be stored longer, it is best to use saved seed after one year as the older the seed is the lower the germination rate.

As tree leaves drop, mulch mowing them into the lawn is a good practice. Mulch mowing reduces yard waste and returns organic matter and nutrients to soil. It is easier and less time consuming than bagging, but can require more frequent mowing. According to Kansas State Extension, if done properly six inches or more of fallen leaves can be chopped by the mower and left on the lawn without causing damage. However, mow each time a thin layer, an inch or so of leaves, covers the turf until six inches has been returned. Do not wait until six inches has piled up and then mow. This process of frequent mowing can continue as long as shredded leaves do not begin to pile up on top of the turf and shade out grass. Ground tree leaves will not increase thatch, which is a layer of dead roots and rhizomes. Tree leaves can quickly pile up on the lawn. If needed, rake and bag leaves, then compost them or use them as garden mulch.