

### The Time to Plant Cool Season Turfgrass is Here

Summer weather conditions we typically experience in Rutherford County and across Tennessee in general are stressful to tall fescue, the cool season turfgrass species most often used in home lawns in our area. This summer's heat and humidity along with extended periods of drought have damaged cool season turfgrasses enough in some lawns to significantly reduce their populations and negatively impact their appearance.



**Mitchell Mote,**  
Extension Agent III

If your cool season lawn is showing the wear and tear of summer stress, you might be hard pressed to see any sort of an upside to it. While it might not be a silver lining to a dark cloud, you can take some comfort in that as the time approaches for the summer stress window to close, the fall grass planting window opens. Thinned out, damaged tall fescue lawns can often be improved by interseeding additional tall fescue seed into them during the recommended planting season which runs from mid-September to mid-October. Interseeding is a practice where additional seed is planted into an existing turf in order to increase the stand density or population of turfgrass.

Grass seed germination is typically greater when the seed is placed in direct contact with the soil, so cultivation that opens the soil often improves interseeding success. Core aeration prior to planting is a common way to open the soil and improve the likelihood of seed to soil contact. Both self-propelled and towed core aerators are available for rent at equipment rental stores. Fairly economical towed core aerators marketed to homeowners are also available for purchase at lawn equipment supply stores. Another beneficial interseeding tool available for rent is a machine called a slit seeder. This device functions like a seed drill in that it cuts slits in the soil and plants the grass seed in a single operation. A common seeding rate for interseeding into an existing tall fescue turf is 4 pounds of seed per 1000 square feet of area.

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If the core aeration followed by broadcasting the grass seed method is used, pulling a flexible drag mat over the area after the seed is broadcast may help increase seed contact with exposed soil. It's always advisable to apply fertilizer to turfgrass according to recommendations from a laboratory soil test. Directions for soil sampling and testing are available from the Extension office or online at the UT Soil, Plant and Pest Center website at <https://soillab.tennessee.edu/>. UT Extension publication PB1576 Selecting, Establishing and Maintaining the Fescues is another useful resource available online.

Tennessee summers can really take the shine off tall fescue and other cool season turfgrasses in home lawns, but the anticipated cooler early fall temperatures can help them to rebound and look good again. A little work in the coming days can help your Tennessee turf excel this fall!

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