

Managing Your Lawn Service



Photo by Pirateplanet.com: It is important that your lawn not be mowed at too short of a height.

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Many of you prefer not to do all your lawn maintenance yourself. So you may hire some type of lawn service to help with certain aspects of the lawn care. Even though such services can be tremendously helpful in saving you time and work, nevertheless, you are still ultimately responsible for your lawn. You will have to be an informed customer and you will have to maintain good communications with the lawn service. Here are a few tips on overseeing the maintenance of your lawn when using a lawn service.

Communicate clearly with your lawn service as to what you expect and what they will provide. Of course, you will have to remember that you are not their only customer, and so you will have to be reasonable in what you expect, especially during busy times like April when it's time for everyone's spring fertilization or during July when it's raining every day and they're running behind schedule.

If your lawn service includes pest control, then the company needs to be under the supervision of a certified pest control operator (PCO). Any employee applying pesticides is required to have an identification card issued by the Florida Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Entomology. Except in the case of pre-emergence weed control, when herbicides are applied to prevent weeds from emerging in the fall or spring, pesticides should not be applied unless a particular pest has been identified as being present. If pesticides are to be applied, it's wise to ask the company for the identity of the specific pest they're trying to control and what pesticide they are using.

If your lawn service includes mowing, then make sure your grass is being mowed to the proper height and that the mower blades are kept sharp. If the mower blades aren't sharp, the ends of the grass leaves will be excessively ragged and torn. A little tearing is normal. A lot of tearing is not. Generally, centipede should be mowed no lower than 1½ to 2 inches, and St. Augustine no lower than 3-4 inches. Shaded or otherwise

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stressed lawns should be mowed at the higher end of the height range. Mowing too infrequently and/or too low can weaken the lawn grass over time.

If your lawn service includes fertilization, take time to evaluate what type of fertilizer the service is using, how much they're using, and when they're applying it. It is best to have a routine lawn & garden soil test run by the UF Extension Soil Testing Laboratory and fertilize according to the results. You may pick up a soil sample mailing kit at the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension office at 615 Paul Russell Road . The primary advantage of a soil sample is to tell you whether or not your fertilizer needs to include phosphorus. Phosphorus is a water pollutant, and so if it's not needed on your lawn, it's best to use a no-phosphorus fertilizer such as 15-0-15.

It is best not to apply more than ½ pound of water soluble nitrogen per 1000 square feet of lawn area at any one time. If the fertilizer contains half of its nitrogen in a slow-release form (the fertilizer label will tell this), up to one pound of nitrogen per 1000 square feet may be applied at one time. For example, you may apply anywhere from 3 to 6 pounds of 15-0-15 fertilizer per 1000 square feet of lawn, depending on the nitrogen source and desired growth rate. Generally fertilizer is to be applied in April and again in August. With St. Augustine grass, more or less fertilizer can be applied over the course of the year, depending on your desired maintenance level. But applying too much fertilizer to centipede grass over the course of the year can lead to decline of your lawn. In fact, many people only fertilize centipede in April.

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