

Time to Overseed Your Lawn or Apply Weed Control



Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension

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It's time to overseed your lawn, if desired. It's also time to control winter annual weeds, if needed. But both tasks cannot be done at the same time.

Overseeding a lawn with a cool season grass can provide a green lawn through the winter. But weigh the desire to have a green lawn through the winter with the extra cost and time involved with maintaining it. It's also time to use a preemergent herbicide to control winter annual lawn weeds if you've had a history of problems with these weeds.

Annual ryegrass is considered the best choice for overseeding a lawn. The seeds germinate rapidly, they're fairly inexpensive and it grows fast. If seeded properly, annual ryegrass can provide a dense, beautiful winter lawn for those that wish to have a winter lawn.

Establishing a winter ryegrass lawn isn't complicated but proper timing is important. In general, October 15 through late November is the best time to plant the seed. You'll have less trouble with diseases late in the fall when temperatures are cooler.

Start by mowing the permanent lawn and raking up all debris. Next, spread ten to fifteen pounds of ryegrass seeds per one thousand square feet. If possible, buy seeds treated with a fungicide.

To get the most uniform stand, divide the seeds into two applications. Broadcast half the seeds in one direction over the lawn and broadcast the rest at a right angle to your original path. After spreading the seeds, it's best to rake the lawn lightly so the seeds make contact with the soil.

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The newly seeded lawn should receive light waterings daily in the absence of rain, until the seeds germinate. Keep the seeds moist but be careful to not overwater. Overwatering may increase disease problems. Once the grass is well established, water only as needed. Light applications of a nitrogen fertilizer may be needed during the winter to provide good growth and good green color.

Timing of a herbicide application is of utmost importance in controlling winter weeds that are about to sprout in home lawns all over north Florida . Common winter weeds that germinate in the fall include annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*), chickweed, henbit, hop clover, lawn burweed and Carolina geranium.

For control of these and other winter annual weeds, you'll need to apply a preemergence herbicide during the fall, prior to the time these winter annual weeds germinate.

Atrazine is the most widely used preemergent herbicide because it has a wide range of effectiveness. But be sure not to apply it as a weed-and-feed fertilizer containing nitrogen. Your permanent grass needs no nitrogen this late. You can purchase either atrazine alone or atrazine formulated with a no-nitrogen fertilizer such as 0-0-7.

For season-long weed control, a second application may be needed about nine weeks after the initial application. To activate some products, irrigation or rain may be necessary following application.

It's the user's responsibility to read and follow all label directions and precautions when using any pesticide. Many preemergence products interfere with lawngrass seed germination, so you cannot overseed with ryegrass now if you apply a preemergent herbicide.

For additional information on winter lawns and winter weed control, visit these web pages: http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/BODY_EP098 and <http://turf.ufl.edu/residential/residential.htm>

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