

## **Fall and Winter Lawn Care Questions**

### **How can I prevent winter annual weeds in my lawn?**

If your lawn has a history of winter annual weeds such as henbit, wild geranium, annual bluegrass, chickweed and lawn burweed, you can apply a preemergence herbicide to prevent these weeds from emerging. Apply it during October when nighttime temperatures drop to 55° to 60°F for several consecutive nights. This will be just before the winter annual weeds emerge. After the seedlings are visible, it's too late to apply a preemergent herbicide. Overuse of some preemergence herbicides may result in lawn roots becoming stunted and weak.

### **Should I use a “winterizer” fertilizer in my lawn?**

The word "winterizer" is misleading. Many of the so-called winterizer fertilizers available in our area can cause more damage than good. The time to fertilize our warm-season grasses in Florida is during the growing season, not when the grasses are going to "sleep" for the winter.

Our lawn grasses respond to daylength and temperature. As the days become shorter in late summer and fall and the temperatures become cooler, our lawn grasses begin to slowdown in growth as they prepare to become dormant for winter.

Applying high nitrogen fertilizer toward the end of the lawn growing season, interferes with the dormancy process, forcing the lawn to “wakeup” (produce new tender growth) at the wrong time of year. You set the lawn up for cold injury.

In general, it is best to not fertilize a North Florida lawn after mid-September.

### **Should I overseed my lawn with annual ryegrass?**

Overseeding a lawn with ryegrass to create a green lawn during winter is mostly done for cosmetic reasons. Personally, I don't overseed because I'm ready to take a break from routine lawn care. I take a break, my mower takes a break and my lawn takes a break. The optimal time to broadcast the ryegrass seed is mid-October through mid-November if you wish to have a winter lawn.

### **Should I let fall tree leaves stay on the lawn?**

You should not allow a thick layer of leaves to accumulate and remain on the lawn for long periods. A layer of leaves left on the lawn through winter can reduce oxygen and sunlight availability to the lawn. This may result in a weak, thin lawn come spring. Also, a layer of leaves may hold too much water and cause rot problems for your lawn. A few leaves (scattering of leaves) should not be a problem, though.

### **What lawn pests should I watch for during fall and winter?**

Fall webworms and armyworms may continue to be active during fall until the lawn is dormant. Your lawn will look like it has been mowed very close when these caterpillars are active. Closer examination of leaf blades will reveal notched leaf edges where caterpillars have chewed.

Large patch fungus is common during the cooler weather of fall, winter and spring. In most cases, this lawn disease results in circular brown areas in the lawn. These circular areas slowly expand, sometimes becoming several feet or larger in diameter. Grass in the center of the circular patches may be green, giving a donut pattern.

Adult mole crickets may be active during fall. Watch for tunneling and areas that feel somewhat spongy as you walk in the lawn.

Fire ants can continue to be active during fall particularly if it is moist.

For specific recommendations on controlling lawn pests <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topics/lawn-garden-pest-management> or [maintaining a Florida lawn](#), or contact your UF/IFAS County Extension Office



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