

## Still Having Problems?

Before you decide to use herbicides, remember: although herbicides are an important tool for weed control, they should not be relied upon solely for weed elimination. Follow these steps before deciding whether or not a herbicide is necessary and which one is the best to use.

Assess the amount of weeds in your lawn. If you have a low population of certain broadleaf weeds, such as dandelions or purslane, hand pulling may be the most environmentally friendly means of control necessary.

It is important to identify the weeds. This will help in the selection of the appropriate herbicide and also determine the timing of the herbicide application.

Try to determine how the weed was introduced into your yard and the conditions that favor it.

Look at cultural practices, along with poor growing conditions, as the possible reason for weed encroachment.

Consider using an herbicide only for invasive weeds such as ground ivy, clover, wild violet, and grassy weeds.

If your lawn is otherwise healthy, learn to tolerate a certain amount of weeds. Even in the best-managed lawns a small number of weeds will be present.

For more on lawn care and weed control, see the following websites:

Univ. of Maryland Extension, Home and Garden Information Center  
<http://www.hgic.umd.edu/>

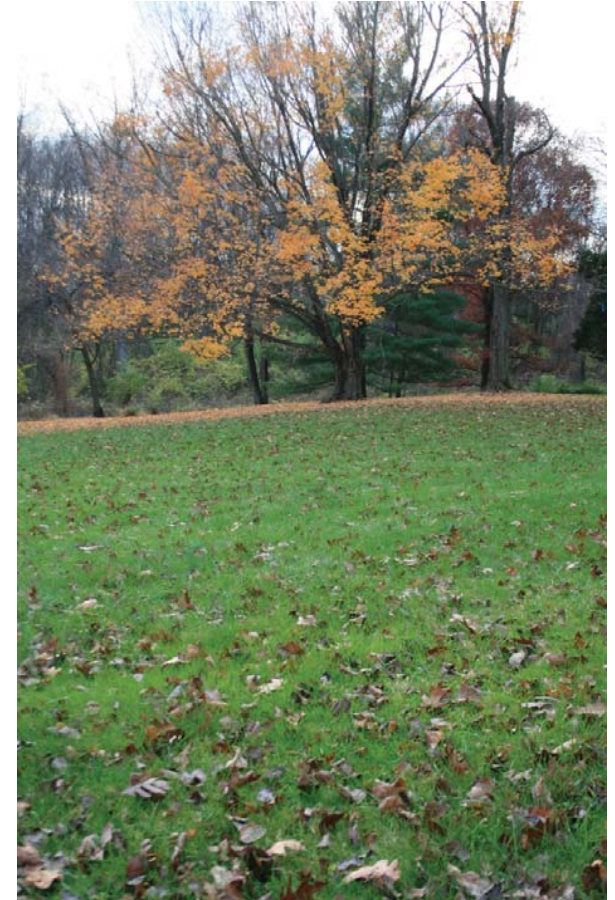
Weed Science Society of America  
<http://www.wssa.net>



The College Park Tree and Landscape Board encourages citizens to adopt practices that promote and protect healthy trees, shrubs and ground cover on private land. To learn more about the Tree and Landscape Board, view our website at [www.collegeparkmd.gov/tree\\_and\\_landscape\\_board.htm](http://www.collegeparkmd.gov/tree_and_landscape_board.htm).

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# How to Grow a Healthy Lawn



**Brought to you by  
the College Park Tree  
and Landscape Board**

Growing a healthy lawn is a challenge for many Maryland homeowners. When faced with a weed problem, homeowners need to look closely at the entire lawn care picture. Studies show that weeds are not prevalent in a dense, healthy, vigorously growing lawn. Remember: weeds are opportunistic and germinate best in thin, weak stands of grass. Although millions of weed seeds may exist in the soil, most seeds do not germinate. However, when conditions are right, a weed infestation can begin.

### Practices That Encourage A Healthy Lawn

*Maintain proper soil pH* – A soil test should be taken every 3-5 years to determine pH. Soil pH should be in the 6.0 to 6.8 range for optimal turf growth. Apply lime according to soil test results to achieve the desired pH.

*Mow at proper height* – Close mowing weakens turf by removing too much leaf surface. Try to mow fre-

#### Key Points

- Tall fescue is the best all-purpose turf for Maryland.
- Seed mixes that contain annual ryegrass or perennial ryegrasses are not recommended.
- Proper mowing is the most important need for healthy turf maintenance.
- The University of Maryland Extension Home and Garden Information Center Hotline is 800-342-2507.

MOWING GUIDE		
	Spring & Summer	Fall & Winter
Tall fescue	2 ½ - 3 ½ in.	2 ½ in.
Kentucky bluegrass	2 ½ - 3 in.	2 - 2 ½ in.
Fine fescue	2 ½ - 3 ½ in.	2 ½ in.

quently enough that you remove no more than 1/3 of the leaf blade at one mowing.

*Fertilize at the proper time* – Fall fertilization is recommended to encourage root development. If turf lacks dark green color and is weak and thin, a light late spring application of fertilizer is also beneficial. Fertilizer should not be applied in the summer when turf is dormant and possibly under stress from hot, dry conditions. Do not bag grass clippings. Clippings that decompose on the lawn will not cause thatch to develop, but will recycle nutrients back into the soil and less fertilizer will need to be applied to your lawn.

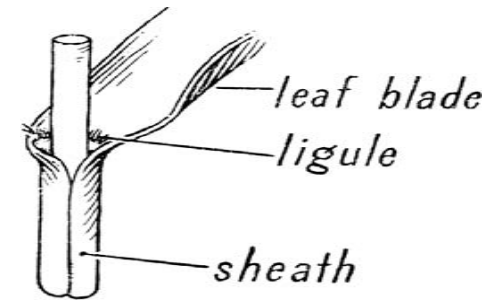
*Irrigate only if necessary* – Watering lawns is usually prohibited during a prolonged drought. Allow established tall fescue lawns to go dormant during hot, dry weather in the summer. The lawn will recover when rainfall and cooler temperatures return. Only newly seeded areas and lawns less than two years old should be irrigated.

*Amend soil to improve growing conditions* – Aerate compacted soil, add compost to poor soil to increase organic matter, and correct drainage on poorly drained sites

*Use the proper seed for your site conditions* – For sunny sites, plant turf-type tall fescue. In shade, plant fine fescue such as chewings fescue, creeping red fescue, or hard fescue.

*Buy quality seed* – When buying seed, choose cultivars recommended for Maryland lawns. Refer to “Recommended Turfgrass Cultivars for Certified

Illustration of a leaf blade, ligule, and a sheath of grass



Sod and Professional Seed Mixtures” (see [www.hgic.umd.edu/](http://www.hgic.umd.edu/)). Check the grass seed label for the percentage of weed seeds. Percentage by weight of weed seeds should be less than 0.1%. Higher percentages indicate a poor quality grass seed.

*Overseed to fill in thin or bare spots* – Overseed in late August through early fall. The next best time is in early spring.

*Remove thatch* – Thatch prevents water, air, and nutrients from reaching the soil. Thatch buildup tends to be more of a problem on Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescue lawns. If thatch is present, you will notice a brown layer of non-decomposed organic matter between the soil and the grass. If this layer is thicker than 1/2 inch, thatch removal is recommended. Thatch should be removed in the fall, while the turf is actively growing. A vertical mower or core aerator can be used to reduce the thatch layer.

#### Organic Weed Control Methods

- Hand pulling and cultivation
- Implementing correct cultural practices
- Regular mowing at proper height
- Horticultural vinegar