



Homeowners Guide to St. Augustinegrass Management in Florida

A.J. Lindsey, Ph.D. UF/IFAS Assistant Professor - Urban Turfgrass Management

St. Augustinegrass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum* [Walt.] Kuntze) is a warm-season grass adapted to most soils and climatic regions in Florida. It produces a green to blue-green dense turf, has relatively good salt tolerance, and certain cultivars have better shade tolerance than other warm-season grass species. For more information on St. Augustinegrass cultivars, refer to ENH5, *St. Augustinegrass for Florida Lawns* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH010>).



- Newly planted lawn should not be fertilized until 30-60 days after planting.
- First mowing should occur once the grass is well rooted, generally 14-21 days after planting.
- For more information refer to ENH02, *Preparing to Plant a Florida Lawn* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh012>), and ENH3, *Establishing Your Florida Lawn* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh013>).

Nutrition

Fertilizer applications should be made following the Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Best Management Practices (BMP), Florida Urban Turf Fertilization Rule (5E-1.003 F.A.C.), and state and local regulations.

- Annual nitrogen fertilization recommendations for different geographic regions in Florida can be found in Table 1.
- Depending on geographic location, annual fertilization recommendations should be split into 2-6 applications and applied when the turfgrass is actively growing.
- In general, the first fertilizer application should be early to mid-April in central and north Florida, respectively
 - » Do not fertilize too late in the year after growth has subsided.
- South Florida, applications may be made throughout the year due to year-round growth.
- Homeowners are encouraged to initiate a program based on the guidelines in Table 1, and then adjust this over time based on the turfgrass response.
- For more information, refer to ENH1089, *Urban Turf Fertilizer Rule for Home Lawn Fertilization* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep353>), and ENH979, *Homeowner Best Management Practices for the Home Lawn* (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep236>).

Establishment

- St. Augustinegrass is established vegetatively (sod, plugs, or sprigs) rather than by seeds.
- It is best to plant during active growth periods, while avoiding temperature extremes.
- In North and central Florida, the best time to plant is spring and late summer/early fall.
- Avoid the cold winter or hot, dry summer months.
- In South Florida, the best time to plant is late fall, winter, or spring.
- Keep soil moist until the grass is well rooted, then watering should be reduced to an as-needed basis.
 - » 7-10 days after planting - multiple, short (5-10 minutes) irrigation events throughout the course of the day. For the next 7-10 days, irrigate once a day to apply ¼-½ inch of water. After this, frequency should be reduced to 2-3 times weekly, again applying ¼-½ inch of water. Once fully established (generally, three to four weeks after sodding), irrigation can begin on an as-needed basis.

Mowing

- No more than 1/3 of the leaf blades should be removed with any mowing.
- Grass clippings should be left on the lawn.
- Standard St. Augustinegrass cultivars – 3½-4 inch mowing height
- Dwarf St. Augustinegrass cultivars – 2-2½ inch mowing height
- For more information, refer to ENH10, [Mowing Your Florida Lawn](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh028) (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh028>).

Watering

- An established, mature grass should be irrigated on an as-needed basis.
- When moisture stress occurs (leaf blades begin to wilt or turn a blue-gray color), apply 1/2-3/4 inch of water per application.
- How often the water is applied, not how much, should change seasonally.
- Follow any local watering restrictions and adjust irrigation accordingly.
- For more information on irrigation, refer to ENH9, [Watering Your Florida Lawn](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh025) (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh025>).

Thatch Management

- Thatch development is greatest in grass that is over-fertilized and over-watered.
- If thatch layer exceeds 1 inch, it may be removed by vertical mowing or verticutting.
 - » Vertical mowing should be done when grass is actively growing and may result in damaged turf that requires a period of recovery.

Pest Management

- If weeds are a persistent problem, use herbicides labeled for St. Augustinegrass.
 - » For more information, refer to ENH884, [Weed Management in Home Lawns](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep141) (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep141>).
- A major insect pest of St. Augustinegrass is the southern chinch bug, which causes yellowish to brownish patches in the turf.

- Other insect pests include webworms, armyworms, grass loopers, and mole crickets.
 - » For more information, refer to ENY300, [Insect Pest Management on Turfgrass](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ig001) (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ig001>).
- Major disease problems are large patch and gray leaf spot, which can be caused by excessive watering and nitrogen fertilization, along with take-all root rot.
 - » For more information, refer to SS-PLP-14, [Turfgrass Disease Management](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh040) (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/lh040>), PP-233, [Homeowner's Guide to Fungicides for Lawn and Landscape Disease Management](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp154) (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pp154>), and https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/topic_turf_diseases.
- Several types of nematodes infest and cause damage to St. Augustinegrass lawns.
 - » For more information, refer to ENY006, [Nematode Management in Residential Lawns](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ng039) (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ng039>).

Local UF/IFAS Extension offices can assist with pest identification and management recommendations. Additionally, a healthy, vigorous lawn is the best approach to pest control.

Reference and More Information on St. Augustinegrass Lawns

ENH5, [St. Augustinegrass for Florida Lawns](https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH010) (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/LH010>)

Table 1. Annual nitrogen fertilization recommendations for St. Augustinegrass in three regions of Florida.

Location ¹	Nitrogen Fertility Recommendations ² (lbs N/1000 sq ft/year)
North Florida	2-4
Central Florida	2-5
South Florida	4-6

¹North Florida is considered north of Ocala, Central Florida is from Ocala to State Road 60, and South Florida is south of State Road 60.

²Homeowner preferences for lawn quality and maintenance level vary; therefore, a range of fertility rates are recommended. Additionally, effects within a localized region and microenvironmental influences (i.e., shade, drought, soil conditions, and irrigation) necessitate ranges of fertility rates. Recommendations also assume that grass clippings are recycled.