

FALL IS THE TIME TO REJUVENATE YOUR

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If your lawn is in good shape after the summer then consider yourself an A1 master gardener. All you need to do is fertilize with a complete fertilizer containing nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium, between September and But if you're like most of us the extended heat and spotty rainfall has left most of us wondering what to do with the weedy brown mess that surrounds our house. There is no need to panic but it is important to act now if you want the lawn to be ready for next spring and summer. Dave Minner, Extension Turfgrass Specialist at Iowa State University says that overseeding and fertilizing may be needed to repair lawns damaged by summer disease, drought, and heat. "The best time to plant straight Kentucky bluegrass is from Mid-August through Mid-September. If you are forced to seed after Mid-September then use a mixture with 60% Kentucky bluegrass and 40% perennial ryegrass by weight. The ryegrass will germinate faster and give better cover before the winter. Grass seeded after October 15 may not even germinate, let alone establish a plant that survives the winter.

If you routinely mow taller than 2.5 inches and have not fertilized since May, then your brown lawn may be dormant and not dead. Taller mowing shades the ground and reduces lethal temperatures that kill roots and dormant leaf buds. Frugal use of nitrogen in the spring and summer allows the plant to harden off and prepare for dry summer conditions. Thoroughly water your lawn one time to see how much living grass you actually have. Apply about 1.5 inches of water or keep moving your sprinkler around the yard until the soil is moist to a depth of four inches. If 60 percent or more of the brown lawn responds by showing new green growth then you may not need to kill the lawn and start over. If you decide that there are just too many weeds and not enough desirable turfgrass then kill the all the grass and weeds with a non-selective herbicide such as Round-up that allows for reseeding after 14 days. Whatever approach you use, now is the best time to plant grass seed. An early start on planting usually results in a completely new lawn cover by Halloween. It is important to use mechanical equipment, such as, slicer seeders or vertical mowers, to insure that the seed is actually placed in the soil rather than on top of the dead mat of grass and weeds. A starter fertilizer can be applied at the same time as seeding. Keep the top inch of soil moist with frequent and light watering to encourage seed germination. Water deeper and less frequent as the lawn matures. Iowa State University Extension Guide pm1055 provides more detail on turfgrass renovation. Other ISU Extension Guides for fall lawn care are; pm1578 Selecting Turfgrass Species, pm1063 Turfgrass Management Calendar - Kentucky bluegrass, pm1072 Establishing a Lawn From Seed, pm1057 Maintenance and Fertilization of Turfgrass, pm1067 Which Grass is Best for Your Lawn, and pm1127 Thatch Control in the Home Lawn.