

Lawns and Shade



Normally lawns and trees are not very compatible. Trees of any considerable size will compete with turfgrass for light, water and nutrients. It is important, therefore, to modify turfgrass and tree cultural practices to provide adequate environmental conditions for both. The following procedures are recommended:

VARIETIES OF TURFGRASS TO SELECT

Plant a shade-tolerant variety like creeping red fescue in dry, shaded areas. Available varieties include: Pennlawn, Wintergreen, Rainier, Illahee, Olds, and Trinity, Red Fescue, which spread by underground creeping stems, and Chewings Red Fescue, which has a bunch-type growth habit. All of these varieties are similar in turfgrass performance, with Pennlawn and Wintergreen holding an advantage. Pennlawn has been the preferred red fescue variety in Michigan due to superior drought recovery capability and better low temperature tolerance. Wintergreen, a new variety developed at Michigan State University, has excellent density, fine texture, dark green color and excellent winter color retention.

If the area is a moist shade, rough bluegrass (*Poa Trivialis*) is recommended. It is superior to Kentucky Bluegrass in establishment vigor but will not tolerate traffic or hot, dry conditions due to shallow rooting habits and succulent leaf tissues. It should be reseeded every year.

CARE OF THE TURFGRASS

- Seed or sod the turf in the fall so that establishment can be achieved while shading is minimal.
- Cut the red fescue or rough bluegrass at two to two and one half inches.
- Fertility and watering - Fertilizing only twice a year (spring and fall), and deep, infrequent watering should be practiced to favor growth and avoid disease problems.
- Cleanup - Rake up fallen leaves regularly during the fall to avoid injury or weakening of the turf by restricting sunlight.
- Observe carefully to prevent powdery mildew disease from attacking the turf. If present it will thin out the turf and gradually kill it. Spray with a fungicide recommended for mildew control on lawns.

CARE OF THE TREE

- Selectively prune out limbs in the upper crown of the tree to increase light penetration and air movement through the tree canopy. Prune in the fall or spring, when it is easier to see what to do.
- Prune shallow tree roots to reduce competition for water and nutrients.
- Fertilizing - Use deep-root feed to keep the tree root system down and prevent resultant injury to red fescue.

Water 12-15 inches deep and avoid light frequent sprinkling, which tends to bring small feeder roots to the surface.

Would you like additional information?

Additional information is available on-line. Please see [MSU Extension-Oakland County's publications](#) as well as [MSU Extension's Bulletin Office](#) on campus.

Contact our [Plant & Pest Hotline](#) (248/858-0902) for assistance with plant identification, pests and diseases, weeds, trees and shrubs, lawn, flowers, fruits, vegetables, grasses and groundcovers, native plants, plant propagation, and many other gardening topics.