



Long Lasting Effects of Winter on Grass in Alabama

The freeze we had this December and then the cold snap in March is still showing its effects on our turfgrass across Alabama. I have received numerous calls from homeowners for complaints, especially on Centipede and St. Augustine lawns having large “dead” areas of turf or patchy spots of dead growth all throughout the lawn.

Centipede grass and St. Augustine grass both have poor cold tolerance, more so than Zoysia and Bermuda and do not do well in extremely low temperatures. The very cold weather we experienced over Christmas weekend 2022 was enough to cause some winter kill in both of these grasses all by itself, but the late March frost, after the turfgrass had begun greening up also added to the problem.

This spring’s long spell of cool weather extended the amount of time grasses spent in “limbo” between spring green up and rapid growth. Although grass begins to green up when the soil temperature reaches 60 degrees F, it does not begin vigorous root and runner growth until after soil temperatures are above 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

Since the soil temperatures stayed below 70 for quite a while, centipede and St. Augustine roots did not start growing and spreading, and this means that fertilizer applications during March and April did not have a meaningful impact causing a delay in regrowth to fill in areas where the grass was killed.

The good news is that the warmer temperature and the continued rain we have received provide a good environment for continued growth for the grass to fill back in on its own or for you to replant, but make sure you are taking good care of the grass you still have to optimize growth before weeds take over.

Centipede grass lawns don’t like a lot of fertilizer so lightly fertilize (no more than 1 Lb of nitrogen per 1000 square feet). Mow at a height of 1 -1 ½ inches and never take more than a third of the blade of grass off during a mowing. Use sharp blades and be sure to inspect and change blades as needed. Centipedegrass can be more drought tolerant than St. Augustine, but most all our grasses prefer about 1” of water per week.

Herbicides should be applied in a timely manner and according to label rates on the product being used. Homeowners should make sure the product purchased is labeled for use on the type of turfgrass they have and the type of weed they wish to eliminate, broadleaf or grassy weed? Remember, pre-emergents go out before you see weeds and keep weed seeds from germinating while post-emergents are for weeds you actively see growing.

“Weed and Feed” products should be used with extreme care, or not at all. Weed and Feed products usually contain a high percentage of nitrogen fertilizer along with a post emergent herbicide and in

Alabama should only be applied late spring through summer when the grass is actively growing and could use a fertilizer boost. Misapplication of a “Weed and Feed” product on centipede grass lawns can result in centipede discoloration and decline.

For more questions and help with your lawn care needs, please contact the Alabama Master Gardener Helpline at: 1-877-ALA(252)- GROW(4769).

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Sources:

[https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1003&title=centipedegrass-decline#:~:text=The%20nutrient%20requirements%20of%20centipedegrass,iron%20\(Fe\)%20availability%20decreases.](https://extension.uga.edu/publications/detail.html?number=C1003&title=centipedegrass-decline#:~:text=The%20nutrient%20requirements%20of%20centipedegrass,iron%20(Fe)%20availability%20decreases.)

<https://www.aces.edu/blog/topics/lawn-garden/home-lawns-centipedegrass/>