

UNL Extension: Acreage Insights

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Choose Your Level of Maintenance

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Once the locations for lawn are identified, you need to determine the overall maintenance level for your lawn. Most folks want a high maintenance look, but are only willing to invest a low or medium level of time and money in it. Be honest with yourself. Identify how many hours and dollars you and your family are willing to spend on the lawn in a typical week, and base your design and planting decisions accordingly.

Consider designing your landscape with lawn areas that differ in maintenance level. The very visible front yard might be high maintenance, the back medium, and the sides low. This is somewhat like combining the best of both worlds, because it still allows you to the freedom to concentrate on that which is most important in your life, such as Bible study or volunteer service.

A high maintenance lawn is generally mowed two or three times per week, receives 4 to 5 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 sq. ft. per year, and is regularly aerified and dethatched with power equipment. Nitrogen is a key element in encouraging turf growth, and high levels of nitrogen fertilizer make it necessary to mow more often. Pest control is given lots of attention, with regular inspections and both preventative and curative treatments. The lawn is watered as needed to keep the soil moist. In all, a high maintenance lawn will require an average of 4 or 5 hours a week. Kentucky bluegrass, creeping bentgrass, colonial bentgrass, and turf type tall fescues are species best adapted to this high input regime. They will provide a beautiful emerald green color, with a thick, luxurious appearance, and they are especially durable under hard use.



A medium maintenance lawn receives the same types of care as one on a more ambitious regimen, but at a reduced level. These lawns are mowed one or two times per week, receive 2 to 3 pounds of nitrogen per year, and are aerified and dethatched as necessary. Pest control is provided on an as needed basis, if and when problems arise. The lawn is watered to keep the soil moist, except when cutting back to save money or conserve water. On the average, expect to spend 2 or 3 hours per week. This middle of the road approach works well with Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, rough bluegrass and zoysiagrass. The result should be a lawn that is green and healthy and very functional, with a moderate level of aesthetic appeal.

A low maintenance lawn is mowed two or three times per month, is treated with about 1 pound of nitrogen per year, and receives soil aeration only if severe problems with drainage arise. In most cases, pest control is nonexistent; if high levels of pests build up, the homeowner simply hopes that the grass will eventually regrow and spread into the affected areas. On the average, you'll invest just an hour or two per week. Choose from such species as common unimproved types of rough bluegrass, Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue and buffalograss. Because these lawns require minimum amounts of time, cost, and effort to maintain, they are appropriate for large yards and are good choices for people who travel regularly or have little time or interest in yard work.