



Minnesota Landscape  
**ARBORETUM**

## LOW-MAINTENANCE LAWNS

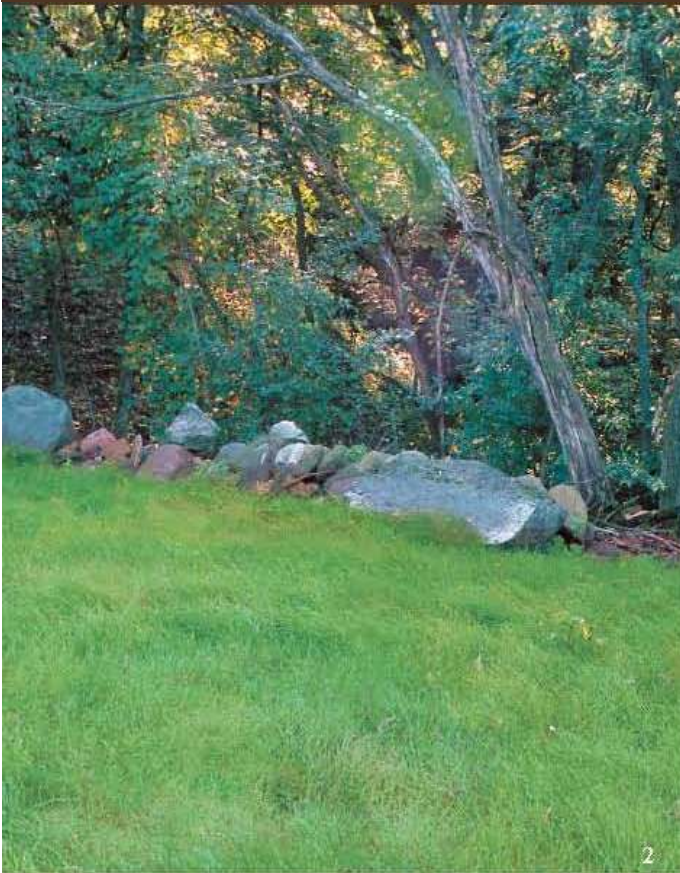


Reduce the Time and Money  
You Spend Mowing, Watering,  
and Fertilizing Your Lawn



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
**EXTENSION**

## WHY GO WITH HIGHER MAINTENANCE LAWNS THAT REQUIRE FREQUENT MOWING, WATERING AND COSTLY FERTILIZERS AND PESTICIDES?



Low-maintenance turfgrass lawns are hardy, drought-tolerant, slower-growing and require less mowing, fertilizing, and watering. Turfgrasses suited to lower maintenance conditions include the fine fescues and some of the turf-type tall fescue varieties. Native prairie grasses may also be an option.

## BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Low-maintenance turfgrasses are earth-friendly:

- decreased fertilizer use – fertilizers can leach into groundwater and enter streams and lakes through stormwater runoff causing increased algae bloom
- decreased air and noise pollution – less mowing and trimming
- reduced water consumption – excess consumption increases the costs for municipalities to supply and treat water and increases homeowners' water bills
- decreased pesticide use - reduced health and environmental risks

Low-maintenance lawns are well adapted to many parts of the landscape:

- difficult to mow areas such as berms and hillsides
- edges in low traffic areas
- shady, moist sites
- lakeshore properties
- non-irrigated sites





## CHOOSE A LOW-MAINTENANCE TURFGRASS

**Cool-Season Grasses** have vigorous growth in the spring and fall with slower growth during the hot, often drier mid-summer months

### FINE FESCUES

Common species used for lawn grasses include: hard fescue (*Festuca longifolia*), creeping red fescue (*Festuca rubra* var. *rubra*), Chewings fescue (*Festuca rubra* var. *commutata*) and sheep fescue (*Festuca ovina*).

- fine leaf texture
- slower growth rates
- tolerance to low nutrient soils
- good to excellent drought tolerance

### TURF-TYPE TALL FESCUE (*Festuca arundinacea*)

- coarse-textured
- adapted to a wide range of soil conditions
- good heat and drought tolerance (winter hardiness may be an issue)
- several new varieties with narrower leaf blades are available

### KENTUCKY BLUEGRASS (*Poa pratensis*)

- traditionally a high-maintenance type turfgrass
- several older varieties (Park, Kenblue, South Dakota Certified) exhibit improved drought tolerance and slower growth rates

**Warm-Season Native Grasses** perform best in mid-summer, become dormant in the fall, and green up in late spring.

### BUFFALOGRASS (*Buchloe dactyloides*)

- excellent drought tolerance, does not tolerate high moisture
- less frequent mowing, watering, and fertilizing
- long term survival in eastern Minnesota is an issue

### BLUE GRAMA (*Bouteloua gracilis*)

- excellent drought tolerance
- less mowing, watering or fertilizing
- doesn't tolerate heavy winter foot traffic or shade

### SIDE-OATS GRAMA (*Bouteloua curtipendula*)

- tolerates low-nutrient soils and dry conditions
- doesn't tolerate wet soils
- suited to reduced mowing

### Sedges

#### PENNSYLVANIA SEDGE (*Carex pensylvanica*)

- adapted to shady, moist environments
- does not tolerate sunny, dry conditions

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Under low-maintenance conditions, the fine fescues and tall fescues provide good turf quality. However, Kentucky bluegrass, blue grama, side-oats grama, and Pennsylvania sedge may have lower turf quality due to lack of improved cultivars.

Several low-maintenance turfgrass mixes or blends are available locally at garden stores, nurseries, home improvement centers, and through mail order and online catalogs.

## CONVERT TO A LOW-MAINTENANCE LAWN

Follow the steps below for a slower growing, more drought tolerant and lower nutrient level lawn:

1. Take a soil test to determine nutrient deficiencies that may need to be corrected.
2. Control weeds; reduce soil compaction and excessive thatch levels.
3. Mow the existing lawn short, remove excessive debris and clippings.
4. Seed by hand or use a mechanical seeder such as a slit seeder.
5. Rake lightly to incorporate seed into existing soil.
6. Water thoroughly and keep area damp.
7. Raise mower height after new seedlings are established.

It may take more than one season for lower maintenance grasses to be dominant. By reducing mowing, watering, and fertilizing, the lower maintenance turf grasses and species will grow and expand while those requiring higher maintenance will become less prevalent. For more information visit <http://www.sustland.umn.edu/maint/existing.htm>.

## ESTABLISH A NEW LOW-MAINTENANCE LAWN

Establishing a new lawn using low maintenance grasses such as the fine fescues is no different than when using high maintenance Kentucky bluegrass. For information visit <http://www.sustland.umn.edu/maint/newlawn.htm>.

## CARE FOR LOW-MAINTENANCE GRASSES

1. Mow three or four times annually. Keep mowing height at 3 inches or higher. These grasses can still look attractive even when left in an unmowed condition.
2. Water during extended periods of hot, dry conditions.
3. Apply nitrogen fertilizer at 1.0 pound of nitrogen per 1000 ft<sup>2</sup> annually (apply between Labor Day to mid-September).
4. Apply pesticides only when absolutely necessary. Before applying any insect or disease control products, accurately identify the problem to be sure any pesticide application is warranted.
5. Pull weeds by hand or spot treat individual plants. There is little need to ever treat an entire lawn.





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For more information on  
low-maintenance lawn care go to

[www.sustland.umn.edu](http://www.sustland.umn.edu)

[www.gardeninfo.umn.edu](http://www.gardeninfo.umn.edu)

[www.turf.umn.edu](http://www.turf.umn.edu)

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