

# Hondalawnlovers

## Top 25 Lawn Maintenance Tips



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### 1 Mowing lawns in shade

There is nothing wrong with mowing lawns at two different heights. For sunny areas, choose a height you are comfortable with, but for shady areas it is essential the lawn is mown at a longer length. Generally in shady areas, the mowing height must be at least 50mm high, and often a height of 60 to 70 mm is best. Keep fallen leaves off the lawn, prune trees at the appropriate time of the year to reduce shade, attempt to reduce wear, and try to use a more shade tolerant variety of lawn. If the lawn variety you have is failing, try over-planting with Viro-Cells of Palmetto or Sapphire Buffalo Turf. These are small cell grown plants that can be planted in the existing lawn, and will gradually take over in the shade. (See photo)

### 2 Long deep watering

Provided relatively tough turf varieties (warm season, not cool season types) are used, weekly heavy watering is adequate in most parts of Australia, even in summer. Warm season turf types include Buffalo, Couch, Kikuyu, Empire Zoysia, and Queensland Blue Couch, whilst cool season turf types include Fescue, Bents, Rye and Kentucky Blue Grass. Sandy soils may require more water than this, but for other soil types it is better to water heavily, say at least 50mm once per week in summer. Often you can leave it for 2 to 3 weeks between watering. In the cooler months watering can be reduced or even suspended. Long deep infrequent watering encourages the root systems of turf to follow the water deeper into the soil. Frequent shallow watering encourages a shallow root system, and weaker turf. The easiest way to encourage deep watering is only to water when the leaf on the grass begins to wilt. Then water deep.

### 3 Have a bag on your Honda lawn mower

Don't you hate it when you are mowing a lawn and you come across a piece of rubbish? You have to stop, pick it up and take it to a rubbish bin. A simple tip is to tie a small bag on to the lawn mower, and as you come across rubbish simply put it in the bag. One walk to the rubbish bin is saved every time you come across litter.



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#### 4 Use Primo on fast growing lawns in summer

Heat and a little rain can make lawns grow at a crazy rate. The best way to reduce unreasonable summer mowing is by putting in a moderate summer growing lawn, such as Palmetto Buffalo, a good slower growing couch variety, or Empire Zoysia. If you are unlucky enough to have to mow Kikuyu, one of the ultra fast growing Buffalo varieties, or a well watered Fescue lawn in summer, try a dose of Primo. Primo is a turf growth regulator that tames the rapid well watered summer growth of a lawn. Often it cuts mowing frequency in half. Apply as per the label. Primo Maxx is available from Globe Australia 1800 244 300 or Nu Turf 1 800 631 008, or for the public the easiest place to buy it would be Elders rural supply stores. You can buy it in 1 litre bottles from these specialist places. 1 litre will last you many years. It is not sold in garden centres

#### 5 Keep a good lawn spade edge around the garden

Spade edges around gardens look natural and blend in beautifully. But only some lawns are really suited to a spade edge. Lawns such as Kikuyu and Couch are simply too much work. For Couch and Kikuyu lawns I would recommend a hard edge such as concrete, that is at least 100mm wide, and 200mm deep.

Lawn types such as Buffalo, Empire Zoysia, Queensland Blue Couch, Fescue, and Rye grass allow for easily maintained spade edges. Buffalo lawns, and Queensland Blue Couch lawns only have above ground runners (Stolons), which means a simple regular trim with a brushcutter will take out any runners trying to creep into the garden. Fescue and Rye grass lawns are easy to edge, as they do not run at all, however they do require a lot of water compared to the other lawns mentioned, and as they do not run they find it harder to recover from wear damage. Empire Zoysia does have both above ground and underground runners, but the underground runners are much slower growing than Kikuyu and Couch runners, so it is much easier to keep a spade edge on this lawn.



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### 6 Establishing and maintaining a lawn in water restrictions

Firstly, if water restrictions are on the agenda, it would be best to establish a warm season turf (Buffalo, Empire Zoysia, Couch etc), and not a cool season type such as Fescue. When establishing the lawn, try to do so in spring, autumn or winter if water restrictions are present, unless exemptions are available.

If a lawn must be established in summer, and often it is necessary, or you just really want to, top dress the lawn immediately after it is laid. Use a washed sand, or specialized weed free top dressing mix. Spread the top dressing over the top at a depth of about 4 to 7 mm, rubbing it into the lawn with the back of a rack, or level lawn. Make sure that at least a third of the leaf is poking through the soil. Top dressing will allow the lawn to survive up to 2 days between waters, but generally it is better to water the lawn daily for the first 2 weeks. Most water authorities will give exemptions for the establishment of new lawns and gardens, so it is worth checking with them. An alternative to top dressing to establish a lawn in water restriction times is to cover the turf with shade cloth immediately after laying it. Leave it there till the turf has taken, usually about 7 to 10 days. The shade cloth will halve the amount of water needed. Water crystals can also be mixed in with the soil at the preparation stage, and this will help the turf survive the dry times better. During the drought, only use complete well balanced fertilisers, preferably slow release types, as too much nitrogen can make the lawn more water hungry. Once established, water the lawn weekly, with heavy watering periods, rather than shallow water applications. Mowing the lawn at a longer length will help the roots grow longer, providing a more drought tolerant lawn. With warm season turf varieties, provided that they are at least 1 year old, it is generally fine to let them brown off, and as soon as they get water again they will come back. The only exception to this rule are some weaker, shallow rooted fussy forms of Buffalo. If using Buffalo, stick to the Palmetto, Sapphire, or Sir Walter varieties, and you will find them extremely drought hardy, and excellent for surviving water restrictions.

### 7 Sharpen those blades

When you mow a lawn or cut a lawn edge use a shape blade, and don't butcher the job. The torn effect of a lawn mown with a blunt blade is ugly. It also helps disease get a hold of your turf in summer.



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### 8 Watering to establish turf

What you are really doing when you transplant turf is helping it recover from transportation. The turf you lay is simply asking to be kept moist for the first week or two after laying. Don't let the turf dry out at least for the first 10 days. In some cooler climatic conditions this may simply mean a water every day or so. In a hot, dry, windy 40 degree day, it may mean up to 6 waters per day for the first week. Simply water if the turf even looks like it is starting to dry out. Be particularly fussy until you see little white roots shooting from the turf. To check this, simply lift a section a few days after laying the turf, and keep monitoring it until you see them. Once you see lots of white roots, you can reduce watering slightly. Once it is difficult to lift the turf, reduce watering appropriately. Always be a fussy waterer when you first lay turf.

If you can't water to these requirements, try lightly top dressing the turf at establishment time or use shade cloth over the top of the turf. This should halve the amount of water required to allow the lawn to strike. Only do this for warm season grasses, and not cool season lawns such as Fescue and Rye.



### 9 What chemicals can I use on Buffalo?

The main chemical used to kill broad leaf weeds in Buffalo is Bromicide MA. This chemical works well on most types including Palmetto, Sapphire and Sir Walter. You have to be more careful with the rates, and also expect some burning of the Buffalo if you have either ST85, ST91, or ST26. The ST varieties' growth rate after spraying with this chemical is also significantly slowed down, which can cause problems in some areas. Don't spray this chemical on a hot day. Ronstar G can be used on all the varieties of Buffalo. This chemical is a pre-emergent, which basically means it stops weed seed from germinating. Ronstar is mainly used by lawn professionals and is only available in bulk. This can be invaluable for use in areas disturbed by construction, or for the planting of Viro-Cell lawn, or runners, or for use on recently laid turf, or established turf in weedy areas. Poa Chek can also be used on Buffalo, which can help remove winter grass. Spearhead is an excellent herbicide for use on Buffalo to take out broad leaf weeds, but it is more for the commercial lawn mowing people and is available only from places like Elders and professional turf chemical supply companies.

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### 10 Management of thatch build up in turf

Thatchy spongy turf can be quite annoying to walk on, and when mown leads to scalping. So install a lawn that thatches less, like Palmetto, Sapphire Buffalo, Sir Walter, Greenlees Park Couch, Empire Zoysia and even the humble Kikuyu. Varieties to avoid include Shade Master, Matilda Buffalo and Santa Ana Couch. In cooler climates like Melbourne, Santa Ana makes a reasonable lawn, but in warmer areas it thatches like crazy. Yet when even the good lawns can sometimes thatch given the right conditions, what are the best management practices to avoid it?

- a.** Try regular short mowing. The downside here is that a shorter lawn needs a little more water. In shade a much taller mowing regime is required.
- b.** Avoid excessive use of nitrogen.
- c.** Use a good slow release fertiliser, and try to limit fertilizing to twice per year.
- d.** An occasional application of seaweed extract, such as Kelpak or Seasol, which is low in nitrogen, and will stimulate microbial activity, which helps breakdown the dead organic matter.
- e.** Try not to over water, as this unnecessarily increases lawn growth and thatch development.
- f.** Some people believe an application of Primo Max will not only slow the growth of the lawn down, resulting in less mowing, but will also reduce thatch build up.

If you ever find yourself with a spongy, highly thatched lawn, there are procedures you can do. Hire a dethatching machine. Or simply severely scalp the lawn, and remove the clippings.

The power of a Honda Buffalo mower really helps here. After a couple of weeks the lawn will look good again. Avoid doing this in winter in cooler climates, and this can only be done to warm season grasses and not cool season grasses such as Fescue and Rye.

Another old time recipe that still works today is to lightly top dress with a sandy soil, making sure the leaf is still poking through the top dressing. Avoid doing this every year, as eventually levels around paths will be changed.

### 11 Soils for less water

The next time you are landscaping, try to use a well balanced heavy soil that will hold water. For a lawn, this may be the difference between watering every second day in summer as opposed to every second week. Heavier soils can be bad for some plants and turf, so you will have to be selective about which plants and turf are used. For example, Kikuyu in Queensland gets a lot of disease in heavy soils in summer after a lot of rain, whilst Empire Zoysia is very disease resistant in the humid regions.



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### 12 How to get Couch or Kikuyu out of other lawns

You have a beautiful Palmetto Buffalo lawn, or some other wonderful type of turf, and unfortunately some untidy couch or Kikuyu has crept in. What can you do? Spray that section of the lawn dead with Round Up (Glyphosate).

After a couple of weeks you will find a dead area. Now the fun part begins. If it was Palmetto Buffalo, Empire Zoysia, or Sapphire Buffalo, you can simply purchase Viro-Cell lawn and patch up the area. This method of patch up is simple and quick. Viro-Cells are cell grown trays of turf. If you have another variety, or if you can't get Viro-Cells, a slower but still successful option is to simply pull out some runners from other parts of the lawn, and plant them in the bare areas. You can also use turf, and fully patch the areas instantly, but for the home owner the simple Round Up spot spraying method is the easiest way.

### 13 Cleaning water on commercial landscape sites, to help water plants and turf

With the spread of water restrictions, we're forced to find water wherever we can. Unfortunately, this often means filling water trucks, or for that matter pumping directly from dams, creeks, rivers, recycled water sources, or even ground water. Often many of these sources are providing water that has diseases such as Phytophthora. Obviously, using plant and turf varieties that are more resistant to disease helps, but even these plants can surrender to large doses from contaminated water. Also salinity, or bad PH can all cause problems. The low cost, easy way to clean this water is to pump it into a tank, and then treat it. If you are using a water truck, then you can simply treat it in the tanker, if you are pumping directly from a water source, you can buy a water tank. Treatment is relatively easy with chlorine, but please check with suppliers like Simple Grow for detailed instructions.

### 14 Two of the worst lawn pests

#### Lawn Armyworm

Lawn Armyworm (*Spodoptera maurita*) is a major pest during summer and autumn, causing severe damage to turfgrass surfaces where they attack leaves, stems and seedheads. Infestations in turf gradually extend outwards from gardens or higher cut turf areas as these plants are used as egg laying sites.

There are several options for Lawn Armyworm control. Chlorpyrifos 500, Bistar and Lepidex are useful options in controlling these pests. For most effective control, application should be made late in the afternoon. For the home owner, the Yates Confidor hose-on lawn pack may be the simplest and easiest product to use, or alternatively try Scotts Lawn Builder® + Grub & Insect Control™ .



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### Two of the worst lawn pests cont.

#### African Black Beetle

African Black Beetle (*Heteronychus arator*) is a scarab species that causes most damage to turfgrass from September to February.

Weather patterns affect the number of ABB and can affect the potential for turf damage. After 2 successive dry spring and summer periods, the number of black beetles can reach plague proportions in the second year. During plague seasons on warm, humid nights in spring the beetles emerge and swarm to find new feeding and breeding sites. At these times green, succulent intensively maintained turf is attractive to beetles as they search for lush food. The beetles are sometimes attracted to lights.

Application of pesticides is best carried out at the first sign of activity in September/October.

Meridian, Merit, Chlorpyrifos 500 or Pennside will provide control of larvae. Baythroid and Chlorpyrifos will effectively control adults. For the home owner, the Yates Confidor hose-on lawn pack maybe the simplest and easiest product to use, or alternatively try Scotts Lawn Builder® + Grub & Insect Control™ .

#### 15 Localised dry patch in turf – causes, effects and treatment

Surfactant (wetting agent) use on low cut turf situations, such as golf greens, is an integral part of turf management, just as it should be on the home lawn. As turf is often in a high stress, low cut situation, the appearance of dry patch can appear quickly and have a very negative impact on turf's visual appearance.

A wetting agent consists of surfactant molecules that attach to the soil particle and allow water to wet-up the soil particle through the interaction of positive and negative charges.

The easiest way to apply a wetting agent is to use Scotts Lawn Builder® fertiliser. See directions on the pack.

#### 16 Fertilising a new lawn

When fertilising a new lawn that is less than two months old it is best to use a fertiliser that has a slowly released nitrogen content, and a good supply of phosphorous to promote good root growth. Scotts have a product called Scotts Lawn Builder® New Lawns & Repairs. It is the safest fertiliser for new turf that is available through garden centres and hardware stores.



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### 17 Wick wiping weeds

Sometimes weeds in lawns can't be sprayed by selective herbicides so you can only spot spray or hand weed.

Another alternative is to use a wick wiper. It can be either a simple hand held wand that is filled with Glyphosate, or more elaborate push devices, or even tractor or quad bike drawn implements. Simply wipe the unwanted weed with the device, making sure you only touch the weed. If the wiper drips, add a little starch. This thickens the mixture, reducing leakage. I generally suggest using half Glyphosate and half water in these devices.

Another simple way is to use a plastic glove. Dip your glove-covered fingers in Round Up and wipe the weed with your fingers. Alternately use a paint brush to wipe the Round Up on the weeds.

Simply let the weed grasses grow taller than the desirable turf, which can take anywhere from one week to several weeks, and then use the wiper at the right height so that it is touching the weeds and not the lawn. Go over it at least twice with the second pass being at 90 or 180 degrees to the first depending on the weed, and then repeat the process a week or two later to make sure you get all the weeds. Then do one last spot weed to get the ones you missed.

### 18 Diagnosing problems in plants and turf

Often you can diagnose problems in turf and plants yourself, however sometimes the problems can stump you. For most of us that's when we need expert advice. It may cost to get testing done, but it will generally save far more money than letting plants or turf die. One company that offers diagnosis from samples is Elders. They are national, and specialists in each scientific area do the testing. The tests cover pests, disease, water, soil, nutrition and more.

If you prefer dealing with government departments, the agricultural departments in each state do a great job. Try asking for plant health diagnostic services. Other options include turf maintenance companies and specialist weed and pest management companies, and soil testing companies offer a wide list of plant and turf scientific services.

### 19 Reduce soil compaction for turf

If your lawn is suffering in drought and is wearing poorly see if the ground is compact. Push a screw driver into the soil. If it does not go in easily, the soil is too compact. The best way to treat this is to hire a lawn aerator from a hire company. You can also use a pitch fork, but the professional corer machines that remove tiny little cores of soil and dump them on the surface are best as they do not compact the soil when making holes. Fertilise after aerating. The best time to aerate is spring or early autumn, but any time is better than not at all.



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### 20 Top dressing

Top dressing is best used to make a lawn level. Cars, dogs, and building works often cause ruts and make a lawn uneven. With top dressing warm season turf types like Buffalo, Couch, Kikuyu and Empire Zoysia you simply spread the top dressing over the lawn. For correct thickness, rake out the top dressing mix thinly over the lawn so some leaves are still poking through. The best top dressing mix to use is a mixture of organic material and a very sandy soil. Top dressing also has the benefit of rejuvenating a lawn as the new growth makes it look young and vibrant. Never top dress a cool season turf lawn like Fescue or Rye grass, as they do not have runners, and will be killed by the top dressing.

### 21 Fertilising your lawn

Turf grass needs to be fed to remain strong and healthy. Use a complete slow release fertiliser in early April and any lawn type fertiliser in early September. Twice per year is usually enough, except in sandy soils where at least 4 fertiliser applications per year are needed. At other times of the year use a slow release fertiliser if the turf needs more growth. In summer avoid over fertilising or using manure based products.

### 22 Mowing heights

As stated earlier it is best to leave lawns longer in shade, but it is also good to leave the lawn longer in summer, as this allows the turf to better cope with severe heat and dry. In general Australians tend to mow their lawns much shorter than people in other countries. A lawn is healthier if left a little longer, but if you like your lawn short then that is your choice. Generally it is best to only remove about a third of the leaf of the lawn each time.

### 23 Mulch mowing

When a lawn is regularly mown and provided the lawn is not too long then the mulching function is excellent. If the lawn gets long due to holidays or rain periods then it is better to use the catcher to bring the lawn back to its regular height. Mulch mowing a long lawn will leave too many clippings on top and could cause disease in the lawn, or could make it rot.

### 24 Common fungus problems on a lawn

In hot humid weather lawns can attract fungus problems like grey leaf spot. MANCOZEB type fungicides quickly fix this type of problem, as well as rust.



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### 25 Keeping the lawn greener in winter

These days people rarely use cool climate turf except in Tasmania. Fescue and Rye grass will stay green in winter, but die every summer. The better Buffalo types and Kikuyu have the best winter colour of all warm climate type grasses. To keep these lawns greener in winter, mow short and encourage new growth in early April. Grow it a little longer again closer to winter, and fertilise well with a slow release fertiliser. When it starts to brown more than you wish, mow the top off the lawn and the green will show up better. In colder areas eventually the lawn will brown off, but as soon as spring hits it will green up quickly. A brown lawn in winter is not really a bad thing, it lets you give your Honda mower a well deserved rest.

Advice provided by Todd Layt, Ozbreed, Pty Ltd

