

David Hallauer, Agent
Meadowlark Extension District
Crop and Soils, Horticulture

Letting Turf Grow Tall Before Winter

On the surface, allowing turfgrass mowing heights to exceed typically recommended heights before winter sets in might seem reasonable. The thinking typically is that the extra foliage will insulate plant crowns to provide them some extra winter hardiness.

If mowing height has been lower than it should have been all summer, allowing turf to get a little taller might be fine. If you've been mowing at an appropriate height, continue to do so! Allowing turf height to exceed typically recommended mowing heights does little, if anything to increase winter hardiness and can actually increase winter diseases such as snow mold when turf gets laid over and matted down

The best way to increase cold tolerance is to increase plant health going in to winter via the use of good fertility, watering, and mowing programs year round! That may mean a soil test and appropriate fertilizer applications (the second most important fertilizer application window for cool season turf grasses: November!), watering if conditions are dry, and mowing at a normally recommended height. For tall fescue laws, that's two and a half to three and a half inches and two to three inches in height for bluegrass species. If you stay within these recommended ranges throughout the season, turf should be in good shape for winter.

Corn Gluten Meal - as a Herbicide?

Fall isn't typically the time when our discussion centers around weed control! Based on the life cycle of most weeds and the environment we're trying to keep them out of, that's more of a spring discussion! Even so, planning ahead is never a bad thing. This is particularly true if a pre-emergent weed control program is what you are after.

One weed control product you might not know much about is corn gluten meal. A byproduct of the corn wet-milling process, corn gluten meal has been found to kill plants (desirable or weedy!) as they germinate, while causing no harm to weeds that are already present or on existing desirable plants. Since it's a pre-emergent, you must apply before weed germination. In the spring, this would mean planning your application for about the time when the forsythia begins to bloom. Results can vary, but expect a 50 to 60% reduction in target weeds the first year with effectiveness increasing with continued use. The product may provide a boost to plant growth as well, since it contains about eight percent nitrogen.

While the product is typically more expensive than traditionally available pre-emergence herbicides, it's a great option if you are trying to avoid synthetic herbicides and fertilizers or just want to try something different! Commercially available products can be found under product names like *Wow Supreme*, *Organic Weed Preventer*, *Corn Gluten Weed Preventer*, *Weed Prevention Plus* and *Corn Gluten Organic Fertilizer*. As with all weed control products, read and follow label directions! Some products are labeled for lawns only while others are also labeled for flower and vegetable gardens as well as landscaped areas.