

## COLUMNS

# Campbell Vaughn: Tips for how to keep your lawns looking their best in early summer

**Campbell Vaughn** Columnist

Published 4:05 a.m. ET May 17, 2024 | Updated 4:05 a.m. ET May 17, 2024

With 7 inches of rain last week and more on the way, I am having a hard time find an opportunity to mow the lawn.

We get a lot of questions about lawns this time of year because people are enjoying the warm weather and itching to get out and do summer activities. Messing with grass is a lot of times high on many yard dwellers to-do lists.

I want to break down what to do and when for each type of our warm season grasses as much as possible, and I am going to simplify as much as I can. I am also not recommending post emergence weed control right now until after the grass has completely “greened up” in about two more weeks. A little bit of spot spraying weeds is OK with the right chemical, but be cautious. Lawns coming out of dormancy can be weak and susceptible to herbicide damage especially in centipede and zoysia grasses.

The heat will kill most of the rest of the weeds by the end of this month. The best weed controls this time of year is to get that mower out and get to pushing.

It is probably too late to get out a preemergence for major control of newly-emerging weeds, but if you have the time and don't mind the expense, you might have some good results attacking later germinating annuals seedlings. Applying this preemergence is only for bermuda, St. Augustine and zoysia grasses, not centipede grass. Centipede will decline with consistent use of pre-emergent products.

Start the season off with a nice sharp blade on your mower. Dull blades tear grass which leads to stunted growth and possible pest infestations. When mowing, start moving your blade down gradually as you are doing your weekly cutting, making sure not to cut off more than one-third of the blade at a time. Bermuda and zoysia grasses need to be maintained at

about 1.5 inches. Centipede should be cut at 2 inches and St. Augustine about 3 inches. All of these heights should be raised by about one-half inch during really hot weather.

**Campbell Vaughn:** Loquat is a great addition to any landscape with bonus of good-tasting berries

One of the top questions I get this time of year is when to fertilize. On all four types of our area turf, do not fertilize until after May 1. Since it is past that date now, you are free to start.

I like to start slow with a medium rate nitrogen level with plenty of potassium like 16-4-8 or 15-0-15. Apply 6 to 7 pounds per 1,000 square feet of turf. Make sure to water it in thoroughly after applying to make sure the fertilizer doesn't burn the leaf blades.

Understanding when to irrigate this time of year is pretty easy. Basically don't. With spring rains and mild temperatures, we have plenty of water below the top layer of soil. When we get consistently above 80-85 degrees and haven't had a good shower in four or five days and don't have any rain in the forecast, it would be fine to irrigate. Make sure to water deep and less often. That means once a week is probably more than enough.