

**Centipede Lawn Quick Care Guide**  
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Centipede is a low-growing, light green lawn grass for South and Middle Georgia. It prefers low fertility, a good bit of water and low mowing heights. Though relatively pest free, it will winter kill or turn yellow and die if not properly cared for.

**ESTABLISHMENT:** Soil sample, lime and fertilize. Till the area, if at all possible. Centipede grass will not grow well on compacted soils. Do not till around trees. Use mulched beds under trees, not turf.

You can seed centipede lawns from early May through at least June. You can sod lawns during the growing season. With special care you can perhaps sod turf during the dormant season. Contact your local Extension Office for details.

After tilling, level the soil and establish the slope away from the house. Rake smooth. Scatter one quarter to one half pound of centipede seed per 1000 square feet. You may need to mix seed with some sand to act as a carrier, since most spreaders will not accurately distribute less than 1 pound per 1000 square feet. To get best distribution of seed, spread half in one direction and the other half at right angles to the first.

Water 1 to 2 times daily for first 2 and one half to 3 weeks and then slowly reduce frequency of watering. The lawn must be watered more often for the first year. After establishment, water with three-quarter inches to one inch of water every time the lawn dries out. This is usually no more often once every 5 to 7 days. See watering below.

For sod, prepare as for seed and lay pieces as close as possible together. Water immediately and as needed to keep sod moist. Check daily. Begin to water more deeply but less often as the sod grows roots.

**MOWING:** Height is very important. **Centipede lawns must be mowed one to one and three-quarter inches high or they tend to die in the winter or during other stresses.** Mow slightly higher in the summer and cut often enough so that you are only removing one-third of the blade at each mowing. Keep mower blades sharp for the highest quality lawn. **Do not mow centipede lawns higher than one and three-quarter inches high!**

**FERTILIZATION:** The main rule is, **do not over-fertilize!**

**For homeowners:** Fertilize no more than twice a year (May and July) with one of the following or a similar fertilizer. Do not fertilize before May 1 or after August 31. Do not lime centipede lawns unless a soil sample recommends lime. Liming a centipede lawn too much can damage it.

<b>Fertilizer</b>	<b>Pounds per square foot</b>	<b>Pounds per acre</b>
12-4-8, 16-4-8, 15-0-15	4	175
18-0-18	3	135

**For lawn service companies:** Lawn care companies often fertilize more often than twice a year. This is usually fine because they apply fertilizer in small doses throughout the growing season. Lawn service companies should apply a total of no more than two pounds of nitrogen a year per 1,000 square feet. A total of one pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet split between at least two applications may be preferable.

Remember that no centipede lawn ever died from lack of fertilizer. Many centipede lawns are damaged by too much fertilizer. Centipede has a natural yellow-green color. It should not be fertilized to keep it dark green and thick and lush all the time. If a centipede lawn is thick and lush, then you can probably expect problems later.

An application of iron will often green up a centipede lawn without causing the problems associated with over fertilization. The grass may turn black if we apply a high rate of iron. The lawn should recover if this happens.

**WATERING:** *This may be the most important step.* Wait until the lawn gets dry to water. The turf will begin to look grey and wilted. Foot steps will remain in it after being walked on. This will probably mean watering about every 5 to 7 days in the summer if we have no rain.

Water three quarters to one inch every 5 days or so or one-half to three-quarters inch twice a week. Do not apply less water than this, as it encourages shallow roots and leads to poor growth and death. Do not water too often (every other day or every day). This leads to shallow rooting, disease and death of the lawn.

How can you know how much water your sprinkler applies? Put a pie pan or tuna can in the lawn and run the system through a cycle. Then see how much water it puts out. Adjust the timer to apply the amount and the timing mentioned above. Some special situations may require more often watering but these should be uncommon.

Centipede is very susceptible to drought. I like to say that centipede does not grow on fertilizer, it grows on water. A centipede lawn will grow well without fertilizer, but not as well without water. Carefully follow these watering practices for a healthy centipede lawn. This is especially important as the lawn is greening up or if the lawn has been damaged.

**SOIL COMPACTION:** Many people aerate without knowing if they need to. Take a small rod or trowel and try to sink it into the ground. If the rod or trowel cannot go at least 4 to 6 inches into the turf fairly easily, you may have a soil compaction problem.

Use a core aerator to pull plugs out of the lawn to reduce compaction. Core aerate as deeply as you can. Core aerate when the soil is moist and cover about 15% of the soil surface with holes. Leave the holes open. Do not fill them with soil or sand. Aerate lawns from April through June. It is best to wait after green up to aerate. Aerating will not cure a soil compaction problem but should help the lawn to cope.

If an area of turf growing in compacted soil must be replaced, till the area before you replace the turf. Tilling is the best solution to soil compaction. Do not till under the limbs of trees or remove tree roots larger than a pencil when tilling. This can harm your trees and create problems you cannot solve without removing the tree. Remember that trees are harder to replace than turf. Consider using mulch beds under the canopy of trees and reserve turf for the more open areas.

For more turf information see [www.georgiaturf.com](http://www.georgiaturf.com) or call your local UGA Extension Agent by calling this number from any non-mobile phone – (800) ASK-UGA1.